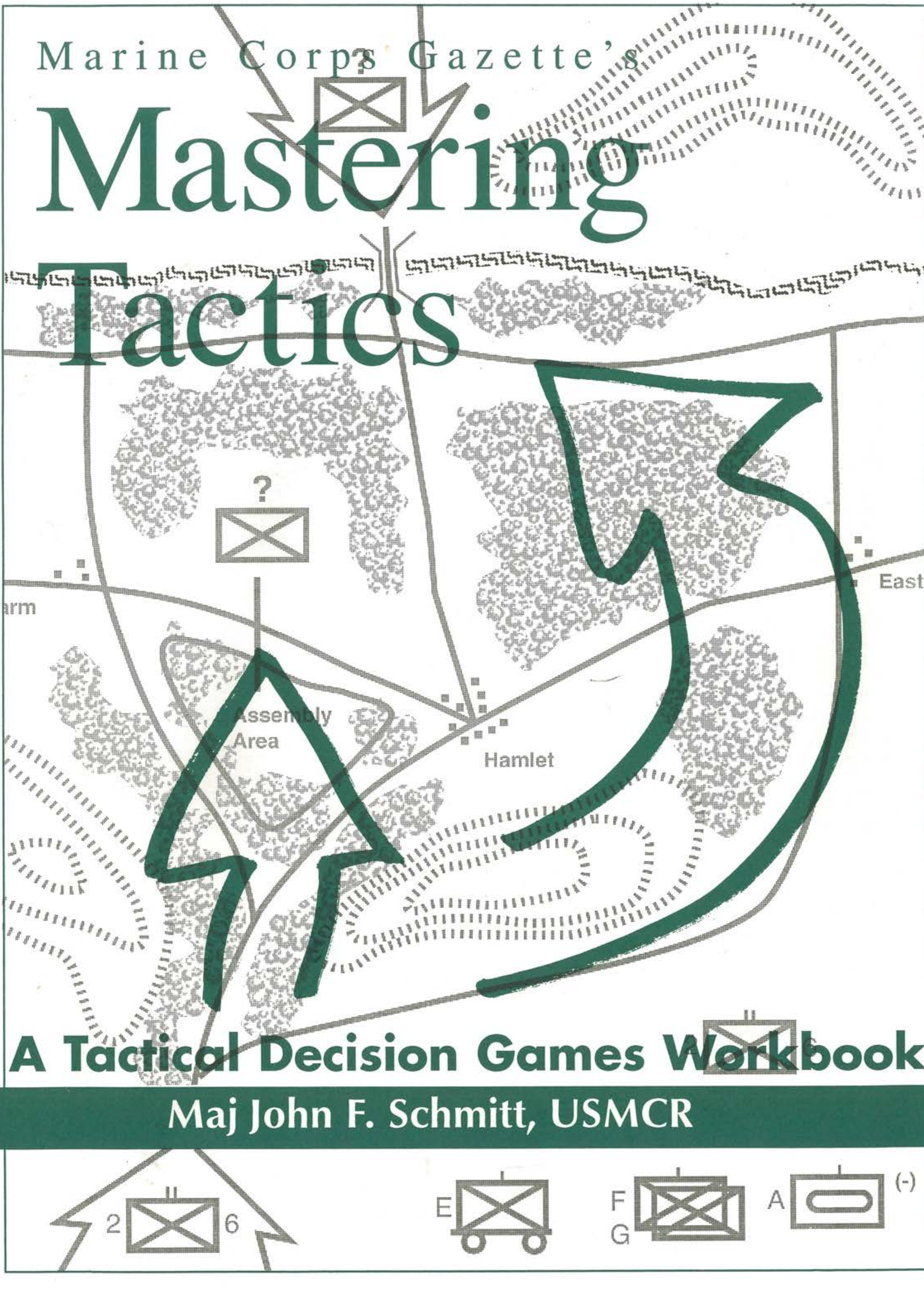
Marine Corps Gazette's

# Mastering Tactics




## A Tactical Decision Games Workbook

Maj John F. Schmitt, USMCR

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## A Tactical Decision Game Workbook

**John F. Schmitt**

**Marine Corps Association**
**Quantico, Virginia**

Credits

Maj John F. Schmitt authored, coauthored, or inspired all game scenarios used in this workbook and wrote all game discussions. SSgt Henry E. Johnson collaborated with Scenarios #1 and #12; Maj Bruce I. Gudmundsson, with Scenarios #3 and #5; and Col John E. Greenwood developed #11 as a direct follow-on to #10 "to insert a word of caution about the difficulty of identifying gaps."

Many people contributed to the preparation of this material for printing: Bonnie J. Martin did the typesetting; Anne H. Wood, much of the proofreading; Robert F. Fleischauer, the layout; and Richard H. Westbrook, the final preparation on the maps.

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John F. Schmitt

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This book is dedicated
to the tacticians at the
tip of the spear—to the
Marine NCOs and officers
who lead our combat units
in the Fleet Marine Force.

# Contents

# Foreword

I first met John Schmitt in February 1988 at Quantico, Virginia, during a conference on Marine Corps doctrine. Though he was then a captain and one of the youngest and most junior Marines attending the meeting, he displayed considerable knowledge and unusual insight throughout the discussions. I later learned that his exceptional tactical wisdom was the result of a number of years of intense and dedicated study, which he had successfully synthesized with his own experiences as an infantry and light armored infantry commander in the 2d Marine Division.

When I returned to Quantico as the director of the Command and Staff College the following summer, my association with Capt Schmitt was renewed. We soon found ourselves engaged with others in long conversations on military matters. He was always able to hold his own in these talks and frequently brought new approaches to the understanding of complex issues. It seemed natural, therefore, to turn to him for assistance when I was looking for a better way to prepare instructors to explain the relationships between tactics and operations, and operations and strategy. His answer was to develop a three-level decision game that instructors could practice on and then use with students in the classroom.

Not surprisingly, there was among the dozen experienced colonels and lieutenant colonels some skepticism that a young captain could teach them much about tactics or operations, let alone strategy. Any doubt faded shortly after John described the historical origins of the concept of "levels of war" and launched into the game. Interest rose and understanding came quickly through his simple device. John refined the game into a powerful instructional tool, variations of which are still in use in Quantico's schools.

When the Commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen A. M. Gray, announced that he wanted to have a capstone manual written on warfighting, Capt Schmitt was detailed to the project. His knowledge of tactical doctrine and his superb intellect and writing skills soon became so evident that he was assigned as the primary author and began working in close association with Gen Gray. That the Commandant, a four-star general, was collaborating with a Marine captain on the Corps' fundamental doctrinal publication surprised many a traditionalist. The book they produced, *Fleet Marine Force Manual 1 (FMFM 1), Warfighting*, alleviated any concern, for it was rapidly and widely acknowledged inside and outside the Corps for the clarity and understanding it brought to a complicated subject.

Promulgation of *FMFM 1* proved to be a watershed event for professional military education within the Marine Corps. The manual was soon in demand by officers and noncommissioned officers alike. Though the material was complex Capt Schmitt's writing style make it easy to read and grasp. Capt Schmitt soon followed up with a similar and equally successful work on campaigning. The value of his unique approach to presenting doctrinal ideas in short simple prose was further evidenced by the decision of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1992 to use the same techniques and format in *Joint Pub 1, Joint Warfare of the U.S. Armed Forces*.

Throughout his research and writing efforts Capt Schmitt continued to create "decision games" as a means to learn and to enhance his understanding of military concepts. He seemed to always have a new battlefield situation available to challenge as-

sociates. Some were historical battles disguised in modern settings and others were original. My favorite was a game which merely inverted the situation British Gen Allenby faced in his 1918 campaign through Palestine. This game had the added advantage that after a player's solution was analyzed a "mirror" comparison could be made with Gen Allenby's actual operation. I am pleased he included an updated version of this game in his book.

It was not long before the value of Maj Schmitt's informal sessions was recognized. In April 1990 the *Marine Corps Gazette* began to publish a series of tactical decision games, and the games became a formal part of the scheduled elective courses at the Marine Corps University. By then the games were most frequently referred to as "T–D–Gs." Their educational value was obvious, and commanders throughout the Marine Corps started including them in training programs for unit leaders. The inherent value in playing such games was clearly understood.

Military leaders are members of a profession that does not routinely practice its skills. Only constant war, a condition too abhorrent to even contemplate, would allow such practice. Thus, the honing and developing of military skills must be achieved in other ways. Field exercises, manual and computer-aided wargames, reading, and more recently simulators provide vicarious experience. Tactical decision games perform the same function, but at less cost in terms of time and resources. Their ease of use allows them to be employed in those odd minutes that are too often wasted. By design they are equally effective for corporals and generals. Used correctly they can reinforce other methods of education and training. Most importantly, they enable leaders and future leaders to gain experience that otherwise could not be gained. Only those who have challenged themselves with countless tactical situations in peacetime, only those who have refined their ability to make decisions and communicate clearly with subordinates, are prepared to command in war.

Maj John F. Schmitt and the Marine Corps Association have made an important contribution to professional military education with the publication of this workbook. I predict it will be in great demand with Marine leaders around the world and that that demand will soon make this edition the first volume of a multivolume set. When Marines next go ashore in defense of our Nation's interest those leaders who have worked their way through the 15 decision games will be far better prepared for the unknowns of combat.

Paul K. Van Riper
Major General, U.S. Marine Corps

April 1994
Washington, DC

# Preface

This book contains 15 tactical decision games, designed to improve tactical skill and decisionmaking ability. Most of the scenarios have appeared previously in the *Marine Corps Gazette* between 1990–1993; several have never been published before. The introductory article, "Are You the Next Napoleon?" describes the intent behind the games and offers suggestions on how to get the most out of them. The second introductory article, "Observations on Decisionmaking in Battle," analyzes the problems of tactical decisionmaking in greater detail. The scenarios themselves range in scope from the rifle squad to the Marine expeditionary brigade, with the majority being designed at the company and battalion levels. The level at which the scenarios are designed is not the significant thing, however. The objective here is to exercise decisionmaking skill and to illustrate key tactical principles, both of which are generally independent of the level of command. Moreover, the reader will find that one of the prevailing themes of this book is that the effective functioning of military organizations depends on shared understanding by all commanders up and down the chain. It is important for colonels to appreciate the problems of squad leaders and for sergeants to appreciate the problems of regimental commanders. The scenarios are designed to be done sequentially; the "Discussions" that apply to each scenario are progressive, becoming generally more advanced and each building on the previous ones.

The discussions should in no way be construed as the only "right" answer. Nor should the different options discussed be construed as meant to be conclusive or exhaustive. They are intended instead as food for thought—to identify key considerations and possibilities. I have tried to make frequent use of insightful solutions submitted by readers to the original problems as they appeared in the *MCG*. Where appropriate, I have used scenarios to illustrate important tactical concepts. But this book is not a systematic analysis or presentation of tactical theory. Tactics are very much a practical discipline, and thus the focus is on the practical application of these concepts to solving likely battlefield problems.

The appendixes at the end of the book provide practical information useful in preparing orders and overlays.

Except where I have cited Marine Corps doctrine, the opinions expressed are my own and should not be construed as reflecting the views of the U.S. Marine Corps. Some readers may find certain of the discussions controversial and may disagree with certain of my tactical assessments. If that is the case, so much the better. Another theme central to this book is that, in the words of Gen George S. Patton, Jr., "There is no approved solution to any tactical situation." If after careful consideration you disagree with any of the ideas contained in these pages, I will consider this work a success. The ultimate object is to generate serious interest and study in the field of tactics.

I owe thanks to SSgt Henry E. Johnson, USMC, and 2dLt Christopher A. Mikucki, USA, for reading and commenting on the manuscript; to Capt John D. Kuntz, USMCR, for his contribution to "Are You the Next Napoleon?"; and especially to Col John E. Greenwood, USMC(Ret), who edited the manuscript and without whose support and vision this book would not have been possible.

# Articles

Nine-tenths of tactics are certain and taught in books: but the irrational tenth is like the kingfisher flashing across the pool, and that is the test of generals. It can only be ensured by instinct, sharpened by thought practicing the stroke so often that at the crisis it is as natural as a reflex.

**–T.E. Lawrence ("Lawrence of Arabia")**

# Are You The Next Napoleon?

*A general should say to himself many times a day: If the hostile army were to make its appearance in front, on my right, or on my left, what should I do?*

*—Napoleon*

*In war there is no substitute for experience, no substitute for the intuitive skill that comes from repeated practice. Tactical decision games are a practice field for the tactical leader. This article explains why and how.*

Think of the Great Captains of military history—Alexander, Hannibal, Frederick the Great, Napoleon, Genghis Khan. We hold these men in high regard because we recognize them as military geniuses, as true masters of the art of war whose mastery of the art form clearly eclipses the mass of the merely competent. Clearly, the art of war places high demands on the intellect of military commanders, and any professional continually strives toward mastery.

**The "Mystery of Mastery"**

But how are such masters made? Are they born geniuses or the product of training? Napoleon's quote makes it clear that he believed intellectual preparation was an essential factor. While natural abilities are certainly a contributing factor, psychological studies show that Napoleon was right. The pioneering work to uncover the "mystery of mastery" was done by cognitive psychologists in the 1960s and 1970s, using chess players as the subject. According to Robert J. Trotter in "The Mystery of Mastery," *Psychology Today*, July 1986:

> It had been assumed that the ability to think many moves ahead and consider the implications of each move was what separated the expert from the novice chess player. But in the mid 1960s, psychologist Adriaan de Groot showed that neither experts nor novices think more than a few moves ahead.

Instead:

> . . . findings suggest that a chess master is someone who, after years of experience, can recognize as many as 100,000 meaningful board positions and make the best response to each. So instead of being a deep thinker who can see many moves ahead, the master chess player is now seen as someone with a superior ability to take in large chunks of information, recognize problem situations and respond appropriately. This explains how a chess master is able to defeat dozens of weaker players in simultaneous play. For the most part, the master relies on pattern-recognition abilities, or so-called "chess intuition," to generate potentially good moves.

According to Robert Glaser and Michelene Chi of the University of Pittsburgh's Learning Research and Development Center in the same *Psychology Today* article:

> The most important principle of skill performance is that skill depends on the knowledge base. In general, the more practice one has had in some domain, the better the performance, and from all indications, this increase in expertise is due to improvements in the knowledge base.

The same principle applies to tactics—which have obvious similarities to chess—and to tacticians. And that is where tactical decision games come in.

Tactical decision games (TDGs) are a simple, fun, and effective way to improve your decisionmaking ability and tactical acumen—to improve your mastery of the art of war. Like most skills, you can improve tactical decisionmaking ability through practice. The idea behind TDGs is to put you in the role of a commander facing a tactical problem, give you a limited amount of time and information, and require you to develop a plan to solve the problem. By repeatedly working through problems like these you

**" . . . the art of war places high demands on the intellect of military commanders, and any professional continually strives toward mastery. "**

will learn not only to make better decisions, but you will also learn to make decisions better—that is, more quickly and efficiently. You will learn to look at a situation and instantly take in its essential features, to cut right to the heart of the problem.

**Coup D'oeil**

In short you will develop the skill Frederick the Great called *coup d'oeil* (pronounced "koo dwee"). *Coup d'oeil* means literally "strike of the eye," and Frederick described it as:

> the talent which great men have of conceiving in a moment all the advantages of the terrain and the use they can make of it with their army. . . . The clever general perceives the advantages of the terrain instantly; he gains advantage from the slightest hillock, from a tiny marsh; he advances or withdraws a wing to gain superiority; he strengthens either his right or his left, moves ahead or to the rear, and profits from the merest bagatelles. . . . Whoever has the best *coup d'oeil* will perceive at first glance the weak spot of the enemy and attack him there. . . . The judgment that is exercised about the capacity of the enemy at the commencement of a battle is also called *coup d'oeil*. This latter is the result only of experience.

Just as the chess master immediately sees patterns and opportunities on a chess board where others see a disarray of pieces, the tactician gifted with *coup d'oeil* sees patterns and opportunites on the battlefield where others see chaos and confusion. While no two battlefield situations will ever be identical, the master tactician can recognize patterns on the tactical "chess board."

**Improved Tactics**

Not only will you improve your ability to make decisions quickly and effectively through TDGs, but your appreciation and mastery of tactics will improve also. An understanding of tactical theory is an important foundation for tactical mastery, but theory will only take you so far. Frankly, the basic concepts behind good tactics are not all that complex, nor are they particularly hard for the average Marine to comprehend. The difficult thing is in *applying* those concepts to specific tactical situations—that is where true genius and the development of *coup d'oeil* come in.

> **"A plan does not have to be more complex to exhibit a greater understanding of tactical principles, greater flexibility, a greater appreciation for the use of terrain, a greater sense of timing, or a greater range of options."**

As *coup d'oeil* improves you begin to make sense of situations that made no sense before, you begin to see patterns, and in those patterns you spot opportunities and options that previously did not exist for you. As you become more experienced you become more comfortable with a variety of different situations. You have the opportunity to experiment with different tactical ideas without having to worry about paying the price in terms of casualties. Your tactics become more ambitious. Where before an enemy movement appeared threatening, now you see it as an opportunity to strike him in the flank. Your tactics become more advanced. Where before your tactics involved simply trying to attack your enemy, now you think of ways to get him to expose himself first. By "more advanced" I do not necessarily mean more complex. A plan does not have to be more complex to exhibit a greater understanding of tactical principles, greater flexibility, a greater appreciation for the use of terrain, a greater sense of timing, or a greater range of options. Often the simplest plans are the most inspired precisely because they are the most economical.

A valuable fringe benefit of TDGs is that you become more familiar with weapons capabilities and employment techniques, the use of control measures and map symbols, and other technical details.

**Tactical Decision Games Group**

I say all of this out of personal experience. I was part of a group of Marines and civilians that met at the Marine Corps University late every Thursday afternoon for a couple of years to play and develop TDGs. The makeup of the group ranged from corporals to brigadier generals, from clerks and drivers to the editor of the *Marine Corps Gazette*, a Marine Corps University librarian, and Command and Staff College instructors in operational art. Some members came and went, but a devoted cadre remained. Those of us who participated regularly unanimously agreed that our tactical skills had improved significantly as the result of the TDGs. Not only could we reach tactical decisions—that is, formulate plans—more quickly and efficiently, but we found we could communicate those plans more clearly and concisely to the group and in general the standard of our tactical plans was higher. Each of the members benefited from seeing how others handled the same tactical problems and from being critiqued by the others—and in the atmosphere of professional fraternity the group consciously refused to "sugar coat" the critiques. The TDGs generated serious discussions on tactical concepts and created a heightened interest in tactics in general. While we may not have developed any new Napoleons, all who participated felt much more confident of their abilities as a result of the experience.

**How the Games Work**

Playing a tactical decision game is very simple. Putting yourself in the role of the commander, you read (or have described to you) the situation; within an established time limit you decide what plan to adopt and communicate that plan in the form of the orders you would issue to your unit if the situation were "for real." You provide an overlay of your plan. Then—and this is an important part of the process—you *explain* the plan as a means of analyzing *why* you did what you did: What options did you have? What factors or considerations were foremost in your mind? On what tactical principles or concepts was your plan based? What assumptions did you make about the situation?

Drawing an overlay of your plan is an important part of the process. It is much easier to be vague in words, hiding the fact that you haven't thought the problem all the way through, than in a diagram. Diagrams are precise. In order to be able to draw a diagram of your concept, you must have thought the

concept through clearly; the overlay is a good way to ensure this. But by the same token, it is equally important to develop a verbal order as well (whether written or oral), because words are the primary means by which we communicate our plans, and we should practice using the same tools we will use in combat.

One advantage of TDGs is that just as in "real life," there are no absolute right or wrong answers—no "schoolbook solutions." Tactics are concerned only with what works. There are countless ways to solve any tactical problem. However, some plans reflect a truer understanding of tactical principles than others. The whole objective of TDGs is to arrive at a truer understanding that eventually results in mastery.

Normally the scenario is fairly simple and the information about it is far from complete, requiring us to make certain assumptions as the basis for decision—just as in combat. Unlike board games or their computer versions, TDGs have very few rules or mechanics to learn. In fact, there are really only two "rules." They are (1) the imposed time limit and (2) the requirement to give the solution in the form of a combat order. Both are worth discussing briefly.

There are two reasons for the time limit. First, it introduces a certain amount of friction, in the form of stress, to the decision process. The idea is to give the player less time and information than he thinks he needs to formulate a good plan and yet require him to come up with one anyway. This is the reality of war and precisely one of the abilities that makes for a successful commander. Second, the game imposes a time limit because combat is time competitive. Speed relative to your opponent is essential. Not only must you make good decisions, but you must make them quickly. If not, your decisions, no matter how sound, will be irrelevant because you will be too late. For a more detailed discussion of the effects of time on decisionmaking, see the article "Observations on Decisionmaking in Battle" that follows.

The reasons for requiring the solution in the form of a combat order are also two-fold. First, communications skills improve with practice. The means that commanders use to communicate instructions to subordinates is through combat orders, either full operations orders or fragmentary orders. The ability to communicate clearly a plan involving the participation of hundreds or thousands of men and pieces of equipment in an atmosphere of fog and friction is no mean skill. A brilliant plan muddled in the issuing is a bad plan. Effective communication means not only clarity, but also forcefulness and, due to the need for speed, conciseness. It is no coincidence that so many of the great military leaders were also inspiring communicators. Second, tactics demand action, not an academic discussion of the merits of this or that scheme: Decision, not debate. "The essential thing is action," wrote Hans von Seekt, once chief of staff of the German army. "Action has three stages: the decision born of thought, the order or preparation for execution, and the execution itself." The third, and really meaningful, stage—execution—cannot happen without the first two stages. The TDGs printed here and in the *Gazette* ask players to submit explanations of their plans, but only *after* they have issued their orders. So the rule is: "Orders first, then discussion."

**Solitaire Play**

There are a couple of ways to play the games. The first is solitaire play, working the scenarios just like you would solve a brain teaser or crossword puzzle. This is the form the TDGs take in these pages. The time commitment is usually no more than 15 minutes to a half hour. This method exercises the decisionmaking process but lacks certain advantages of the second method.

**Group Play**

The second method is to play the game in an interactive group, with one player (usually the senior or most experienced member) acting as moderator. The moderator describes the scenario to the players, answers questions (some, but not all) about the situation, enforces the time limit, selects different players to brief their plans to the group, and moderates the critique of each plan. The moderator plays devil's advocate, introducing "What ifs" and asking "Why did you do that?" The advantages of group play are:

**"The ability to communicate clearly a plan involving the participation of hundreds or thousands of men and pieces of equipment in an atmosphere of fog and friction is no mean skill. A brilliant plan muddled in the issuing is a bad plan."**

- A built-in sense of pressure and competition. Players' abilities are on display for others to see.
- Immediate feedback. Each player gets a critique of his plan from the moderator and other players.
- Practice giving orders. Each player must actually issue his order to the group.
- See other solutions. Players can see how others approached the same problem, gaining insights that they can add to their own repertoire.
- Teamwork. Especially within operating units, these group sessions can help develop intuitive understanding among members.
- Generates discussion in tactics. As happened in the Quantico group, the TDGs become a catalyst for sharing tactical ideas. Of Scenario #9, "The Enemy Over the Bridge," *MCG*, Jun90, Cpl J. R. Murphy wrote:

> I have shown your article to three other Marines, and have been involved in three heated conversations regarding the scenario and what course of action the frag order should initiate. This simple tool that you've published has the demonstrated ability to really turn on some minds.

This method is ideally suited to officers' or NCOs' calls or professional development sessions within units. (In fact, Scenario #7, "Securing Cam-Pljuna," was specifically developed for the 2d Bat-

talion, 2d Marines PME program.) The group method works best using an overhead projector so players can project an overlay of their plan for their briefing.

**Two-Sided or "Double-Blind" Play**

A third, more involved, method is two-sided play. Two-sided play involves a controller and two opposing teams. The teams solve the same problem, but from opposing sides. The controller compares the two solutions and makes judgments about the result: Blue's tanks platoon is ambushed by TOWs at the clearing; Red's LAI company has reached the bridge with no enemy contact; a Blue rifle company has broken through Red lines in the woods with moderate casualties. The controller then separately presents each team with the updated situation—i.e., a new problem to solve. Each team "sees" only those enemy forces it has been able to locate by its own means. Now, instead of allowing the teams to develop deliberate plans, the controller requires commanders to issue fragmentary orders "on the spot": "Alpha Company, attack north to seize the bridge in order to deny its use to the enemy." The controller then compares the new fragmentary orders, generates another updated situation, and the game continues. After four or five turns the teams have fought out an engagement.

> **"In reality units get lost, orders get misunderstood, subordinates make bad decisions, important intelligence reports get misplaced, communications break down, and nothing happens as fast as it should."**

This version more resembles a conventional war game than the others and takes up to a couple of hours to play. But rather than relying on movement ratings, casualty tables, and dice rolls like a board game, the two-sided TDG relies on the judgment of the controller for its results. The actual results are not as important as the fact that they create new tactical problems for the players to solve. This version works best if each team includes several players, a senior commander, and several subordinates to lead the different units.

**Friction**

Clausewitz wrote that "friction is the only concept that more or less corresponds to the factors that distinguish real war from war on paper." TDGs are, quite literally, war on paper and so are not subject to the countless difficulties that distinguish real war. In reality units get lost, orders get misunderstood, subordinates make bad decisions, important intelligence reports get misplaced, communications break down, and nothing happens as fast as it should. A plan that seems simple in conception can be extremely difficult in execution. A plan brilliant in conception that is impossible to execute given the circumstances is not brilliant at all, but foolish. Commanders' responsibilities do not stop when they issue their orders, of course; they must also supervise the execution of their plans. But TDGs stop short of execution. You should keep this in mind when playing TDGs so as not to get the impression this whole business is much easier than it really is. In the group version, the moderator should serve as a "reality check" by questioning the feasibility of the various plans: "Do you really expect to make a 12-mile forced march through the woods at night?

**Solve the Problem, Don't Critique It**

In order to keep the scenarios from getting too complicated and unwieldly, the situation descriptions are intentionally short and simple. This also adds an element of the uncertainty that is present in any tactical situation. In any situation, a commander could identify countless pieces of information he wishes he had, as well as countless inconsistencies in the information he does have. Since this is so, he must make certain assumptions. Dealing with uncertainty is one of the fundamental challenges of tactical decisionmaking. It is easy and tempting to pick apart a simplified scenario and call it unrealistic, inconsistent, or impossible. But that is simply avoiding the challenge. The fact is, war is full of unrealistic, inconsistent, and apparently impossible happenings. It is important to take the scenarios on their own terms.

One captain's response to Scenario #1, "Ambush At Dusk," *MCG*, Nov91, was not to offer a solution but to question how the unit in question got into the situation it did—probably a reasonable criticism. But in fact, the scenario was based on an actual incident in Vietnam, and a more detailed account could have explained more fully why the unit was where it was. More important, whether or not the unit should ever have gotten into that predicament in the first place, it did and Marines had to find a way out.

The person whose first response to a problem scenario is to complain, "This would never happen," is probably the same person who has trouble dealing with unexpected situations. As with any problem, the best advice is to solve it first and *then* figure out how it could have happened.

**In Closing**

Experience is the great teacher. Unfortunately, ours is a field in which experience can cost dearly. As Field Marshal Sir William Slim wrote of taking over British forces in Burma in 1942: "Experience taught a good deal, but with the Japanese as instructors it was an expensive way of learning." We are professionally obligated to do whatever we can to gain whatever experience we can without paying full price. That is precisely why we study past campaigns, and precisely why we should play tactical decision games.

Now, it's time for your first mission. Good luck!

USMC

# Observations on Decisionmaking in Battle

*This article first appeared in the* Marine Corps Gazette *in March 1988. It is included here because it has exactly the same intent as TDGs—to improve tactical decisionmaking ability. This article goes a long way toward explaining certain of the design features of TDGs, such as the strict and demanding time limit and the intentional lack of scenario information.*

Decisionmaking is the essence of command in battle. By this I do not mean to diminish the importance of execution, for in battle the final accounting is based on results, not intentions, and even the best decision executed poorly is a sure means for defeat. Nor do I mean to exclude the other numerous challenges and responsibilities of command. But the responsibility for making decisions is the domain of the commander and no one else. While the commander may solicit advice and suggestions from any of his subordinates, the decision on a specific course of action is his alone.

All military operations are based on decisions. Command and staff actions are merely implements for reaching and executing decisions. Victory is a reflection of sound decisions skillfully executed.

War being a conflict between opposing wills, battlefield decisions are not made in a vacuum. While the commander is trying to impose his will upon the enemy, the enemy is trying to do the same to him. As a result, decisionmaking becomes a competitive process with the goal being to make and execute those decisions more quickly than the enemy. Clearly, the combatant who establishes a tempo that is faster than his opponent's gains a significant advantage. He retains the initiative. The focus of this article is to look at the factors that give the commander this advantage—at the factors that enable him to make sound and timely tactical decisions.

**Observations**

The first observation is that decisionmaking as a skill fits in the realm of the art of war rather than the science. The 1962 edition of the U.S. Army's *FM 100-5, Operations*, stated that:

> Although arrived at through an analytical and orderly process, the commander's decision is not merely a mathematical computation. It is an intuitive and creative act based on consideration of all the factors involved. Its soundness is a reflection of the commander's professional competence, experience, intelligence, perception, boldness, and strength of character.

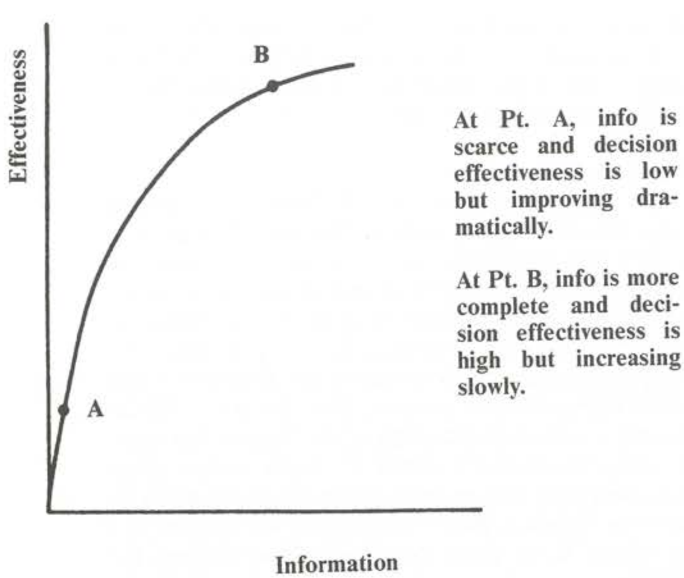
Our institution has developed command and staff actions to help standardize and formalize the procedures for reaching and implementing decisions: estimates of the situation, estimates of supportability, and courses of action are a few examples. At the same time, commanders are expected to demonstrate an understanding of enemy doctrine, tactics, and techniques; a knowledge of the characteristics and relative capabilities of weapons and equipment; and a keen appreciation for time-distance factors. While these are all useful tools, they are not a scientific equation for success and must not dictate tactical decisions. They provide a foundation for applying experience and judgment, but they cannot negate the artistic element that is the heart of decisionmaking. To seek cover behind them is to deny the moral responsibility of command.

The second observation is that, as discussed in the quotation above, decisionmaking is a process requiring two distinct skills. The commander must be a master of both. First, he must have the intuitive skill to recognize the essence of a given problem. Second, he must have the creative ability to devise a practical solution to it.

> **“First, the commander must have the moral courage to make tough decisions in the face of uncertainty—and to accept full responsibility for those decisions—when the natural inclination is to put off the decision pending complete information.”**

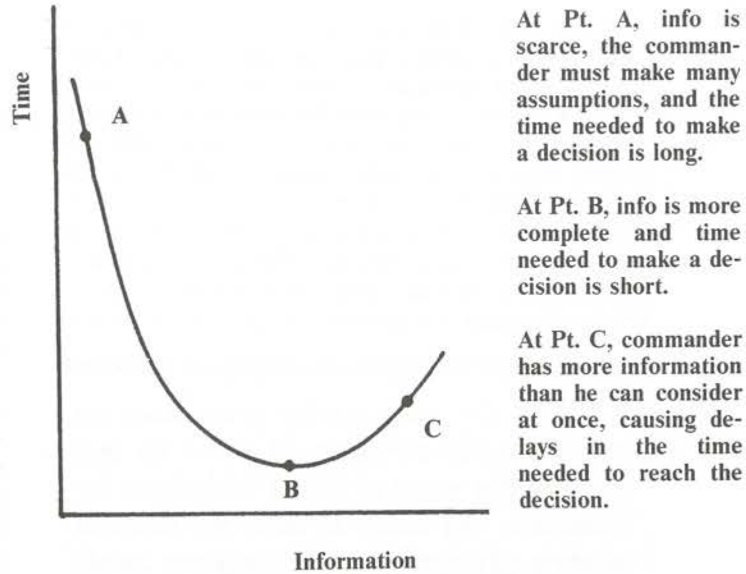
The third observation is that the lower the echelon of command, the simpler, faster, and more direct is the decision process. A small-unit leader's decisions are based on a relatively few factors that he usually observes firsthand. At successively higher echelons of command, circumstances become more numerous and complex, and the commander is further removed from events by time and distance.

There are various factors that weigh on the art of decisionmaking. By these I do not mean the commonly understood factors that affect the decision itself—the mission, friendly and enemy capabilities, terrain, and weather—but those that affect the decision process. Among others, these include *certainty, information, time,* and *risk*.




The Effect of Information on
the Potential Effectiveness of a Decision.

*Figure 1*




The Effect of Information on
the Time Needed to Reach a Decision.

*Figure 2*

**Certainty**

In *Command in War*, historian Martin Van Creveld describes command as:

> An endless quest for certainty—about the state and intentions of the enemy's forces; certainty about the manifold factors that together constitute the environment in which the war is to be fought, from the weather and the terrain to radioactivity and the presence of chemical warfare agents; and last, but definitely not least, certainty about the state, intentions, and activities of one's own forces.

The more the commander knows of these factors, the more specific he can make his plan.

While the desire for certainty is a natural human trait, the very nature of battle makes absolute certainty an impossibility. The commander must not become enslaved to its pursuit. Referred to as the "fog of war," uncertainty pervades the battlefield. The commander must accept a degree of uncertainty, which he compensates for by developing flexible plans, planning for contingencies, developing standing operating procedures (SOPs), developing initiative in his subordinates, issuing mission-type orders, and making his intent clearly understood.

The moral courage to make decisions in the face of uncertainty is an essential trait in a commander.

**Information**

The second factor is information. Certainty is largely a function of information. In general, the more information a commander has at his disposal, the more effective his decisions. The commander attempts to reduce uncertainty by seeking information about the enemy, the environment, and his own situation as well. However, in the heat of battle, perhaps the only certainty is that available information will always be incomplete, will usually be inaccurate, and will sometimes even be contradictory.

Early in the decision process, when information is scarce, the effectiveness of a decision increases dramatically as information increases. However, at some point in the process, when basic information has been obtained and the effort concentrates on details, the commander reaches a point of diminishing returns—when the potential effectiveness of his decision does not improve in proportion to the information obtained or the time and effort needed to obtain it. See Figure 1. The commander who delays his decision beyond this point risks surrendering the initiative.

> **"Second, the commander must have the moral courage to make bold decisions and accept the necessary degree of risk when the natural inclination is to choose a less ambitious task."**

**Time**

Time is an essential consideration in the decisionmaking process. The 1954 edition of *FM 100-5* stated that "timeliness of decision is the essence of command action." Timely decisions require rapid thinking, with consideration often limited to essential factors.

The commander should spare no effort to streamline his information-gathering and decisionmaking procedures to promote rapid decisionmaking. Toward this end, he can decentralize decisionmaking by promoting initiative among his subordinates. This is possible through the use of mission-type orders and the clear expression of intent but requires qualified subordinates. The commander can also locate himself closer to the critical events that will influence the

situation so that he can observe them directly and circumvent the delays and inaccuracies that result from passing information up the chain of command.

As the amount of information increases to a point, the time necessary to make an effective decision decreases. Beyond this point, however, additional information has the opposite effect; it only serves to cloud the situation, causing the commander to require longer to reach the same effective decision that he could have reached sooner with less information. The commander has more information than he can digest quickly, and he has difficulty focusing on key factors. See Figure 2. Consequently, the commander must be careful to limit the amount of information he considers to those essential elements that allow him to make his decision quickly and with reasonable certainty. He must be able to identify and focus on the central circumstances influencing a given decision, and elsewhere he must exercise economy of thought. Focus of effort applies to decisionmaking as well as combat power.

> **"Third, the commander must have an intuitive understanding of when he has reached the point at which additional information only serves to delay the decision or when additional certainty will not justify the time and effort spent gaining it."**

**Risk**

A commander's decision invariably involves the estimation and acceptance of risk. Risk is inherent in war and is involved in every mission. Part of risk is the uncontrollable element of chance. Risk is also related to gain; normally, greater potential gain requires greater risk. Further, risk is equally common to both action and inaction.

The practice of concentrating combat power at the focus of effort and economizing elsewhere by its nature requires risk. Willingness to accept risk is another element of the moral courage of command.

It is human nature to try to minimize risk by choosing a less ambitious course. But Napoleon advised that "in audacity and obstinacy will be found safety." I do not propose recklessness, but I suggest that more decisions suffer from attempting too little than from attempting too much. Field Marshal Erwin Rommel wrote:

> Bold decisions give the best promise of success. But one must differentiate between strategical or tactical boldness and a military gamble. A bold operation is one in which success is not a certainty but which in the case of failure leaves one with sufficient forces in hand to cope with whatever situation may arise. A gamble, on the other hand, is an operation which can lead either to victory or to the complete destruction of one's force.

Although the commander avoids unnecessary risks, the accomplishment of the mission is the most important consideration. The commander must evaluate each possible course of action in terms of relative risk. If the degree of risk is unacceptable, he must seek another solution.

**The Decision**

The complex interaction of these basic factors poses the commander with a dilemma. His task is to select a course of action with reasonable certainty of success and an acceptable degree of risk and to reach his decision more quickly than his foe. As stated at the outset, there is no formula for this process; it is a complex and often subconscious act. It is also a skill which improves with practice; thus the use of TDGs. An improved understanding of the factors that work on the commander's ability to make tactical decisions will help him to make those decisions more effectively. Below, I have summarized the lessons as I see them. Keep them in mind when playing the TDGs.

First, the commander must have the moral courage to make tough decisions in the face of uncertainty—and to accept full responsibility for those decisions—when the natural inclination is to put off the decision pending complete information. To delay action in an emergency because of incomplete information shows a lack of energetic leadership and courage.

Second, the commander must have the moral courage to make bold decisions and accept the necessary degree of risk when the natural inclination is to choose a less ambitious tack.

> **". . . in the heat of battle, perhaps the only certainty is that available information will always be incomplete, will usually be inaccurate, and will sometimes even be contradictory."**

Third, the commander must have an intuitive understanding of when he has reached the point at which additional information only serves to delay the decision or when additional certainty will not justify the time and effort spent gaining it. On one hand, the commander should not make rash decisions based on insufficient information. Gen A.A. Vandegrift warned: "Never allow yourself to be unduly rushed or stampeded. There is usually ample time for considered judgment, even during battle." But, on the other hand, the commander must not squander opportunities while trying to gain more complete information.

And finally, since all decisions in battle must be made in the face of uncertainty and since every situation is unique, there is no perfect solution to any battlefield problem. Therefore, the commander should not agonize over one. He should arrive at a reasonable decision quickly and execute it swiftly and aggressively. To quote Gen George S. Patton, Jr.: "A good plan violently executed *now* is better than a perfect plan executed next week." USMC

# Scenarios

The problem is to grasp, in innumerable special cases, the actual situation which is covered by the mists of uncertainty, to appraise the facts correctly and to guess the unknown elements, to reach a decision quickly, and then to carry it out forcefully and relentlessly.

**–Helmuth von Moltke**

# Ambush at Dusk

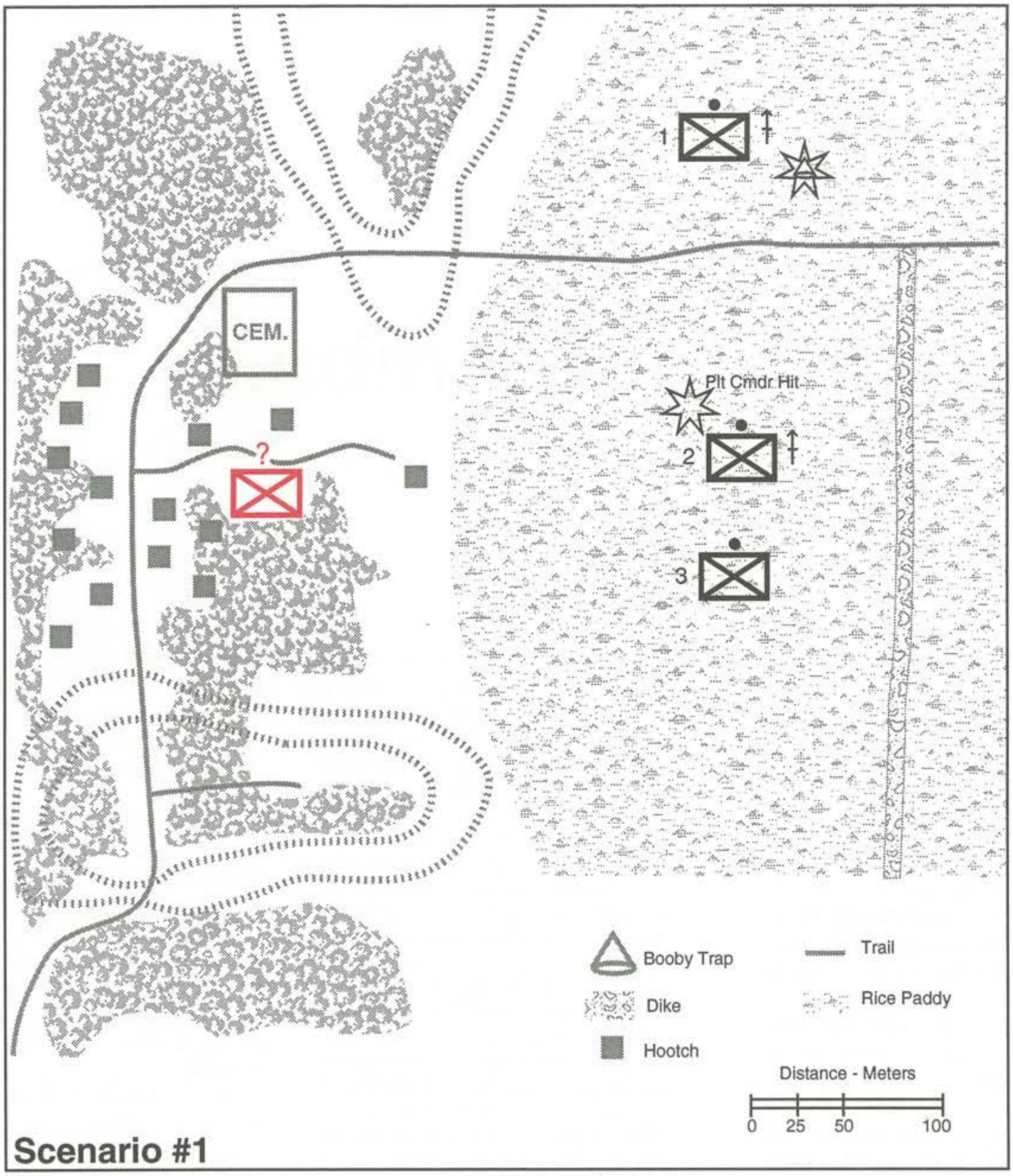
## SITUATION

You are the squad leader of 1st Squad, 1st Platoon, Company C, 1st Battalion, 9th Marines. You are fighting in a tropical area against guerrilla forces armed with small arms, light machineguns, and sometimes mortars and rocket-propelled grenades. Recently, Company C has been conducting patrols in a populated region to counter increased insurgent activity. Today, your platoon with a machinegun squad attached is running a security patrol along a designated route. You are to attack and destroy any enemy forces you locate. Dusk is approaching within the hour. Your squad is the point of the platoon patrol column, some 200 yards forward of the platoon's main body, advancing north through a rice paddy, paralleling a 2-foot-high dike to your right. You have learned from experience not to walk on the dikes or trails because they are frequently booby-trapped; although uncomfortable, the rice paddies are generally the safest places to move. To your west is a village. East of the dike is another rice paddy and another small village.

As your squad crosses a trail at the northern edge of the paddy, one of your Marines trips a booby trap, suffering a severe leg wound. Suddenly, the enemy opens fire with automatic weapons from the village to the west, and the platoon commander is hit. The steady volume of fire from the village has 2d and 3d squads pinned down in the rice paddy. After tending to the lieutenant, the corpsman courageously makes his way forward under fire to your position, followed shortly by one machinegun team. The corpsman tells you the lieutenant is in a bad way. You wish you had a radio, but the platoon's radioman is pinned down near the lieutenant. The enemy fire against your position is sporadic; the two squads in the paddy are returning fire but appear unable to move. You estimate that the sun will disappear within a half hour. You have no communications with your platoon sergeant. What do you do?

## REQUIREMENT

In a time limit of five minutes, draft the frag order you would issue to your team leaders and describe any additional actions you would take. Include an overlay sketch and provide a brief explanation of the rationale behind your action.




For discussion, see pp. 42-44.
Game appeared in *Marine Corps Gazette,* Nov91; solutions, Jan92

# Platoon Ambush

## SITUATION

You are the second squad leader of 1st Platoon, Company A, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines. You have been fighting enemy infantry forces in wooded, rolling terrain. Your platoon commander tells you that the platoon has been given the mission to conduct a patrol behind enemy lines to establish an ambush along a main supply route frequently used by enemy supply convoys to move supplies forward (west) from Depot, which is located about 5 kilometers east of the ambush site. The convoys usually consist of a machinegun jeep in front followed by a half-dozen or so covered trucks. There is a strong enemy garrison of motorized forces at Depot. The lieutenant plans to set in an L-shaped ambush with two squads and two attached machinegun squads at a bend in the road just east of Beaver Dam Run. "It'll be like shooting fish in a barrel," he says. He plans to blow the log bridge to the west, detonating it when he springs the ambush. Your squad, with one 60mm mortar team attached, will protect the other flank of the ambush from a position on the high ground to the east of the ambush site. You will be linked to the ambush by landline. In his patrol order under "Tasks," the lieutenant gives you the following instructions:

> When we get to the ORP [objective rallying point], you will move out first to your position to provide security for the rest of the platoon while it sets in the ambush. The platoon will move out 30 minutes later. You'll take a phone and LCpl Cooley [the platoon runner] with you. He'll run the wire from your position back to the ambush site. Find a position that gives you a good view of the road toward Depot so you can provide early warning and information of the convoy's approach. When you get in position, stay concealed and stay put. Once the ambush is sprung you will isolate the objective area by engaging any enemy forces trying to get in or out. You will provide protection for the platoon as it withdraws to the ORP. It's especially important that you delay any react forces coming from the Depot garrison. A green-star cluster is the signal that you can withdraw back to the ORP. Surprise is essential, so it's imperative, under all circumstances, that you stay concealed and not open fire until the ambush has been sprung, got it?

Before departing on the patrol you draw one AT4 per fire team. In addition, each of your squad members is carrying one 60mm mortar round.

Everything goes as planned to the ORP. From the ORP you move out to your position. En route you cross a narrow animal track not on your map. You reach your destination and find a good position from which you can cover the Depot Road. You set in the mortar to cover the road to the east by direct lay. You hook up the landline, but the connection is bad; neither party can understand what the other is saying. Meanwhile, something attracts your attention to the southeast. Movement of some kind? You send 1st Fire Team to check it out, and return to supervising the defensive preparations.

Fifteen minutes later, 1st Fire Team returns, out of breath.

"What have you got, Cpl Turner?" you ask.

"An enemy foot patrol, 20–25 men, moving west through the woods about 200 yards south, auto weapons and light machineguns," he replies.

"Did they see you?"

"Hell no," he says with a grin. "Who do you think you're talking to?"

You try to get through to the platoon on the landline, but the connection is very bad.

"Roger, I copy that the convoy's on the way," comes the reply. "We're ready for 'em. Remember, don't engage until after the ambush goes."

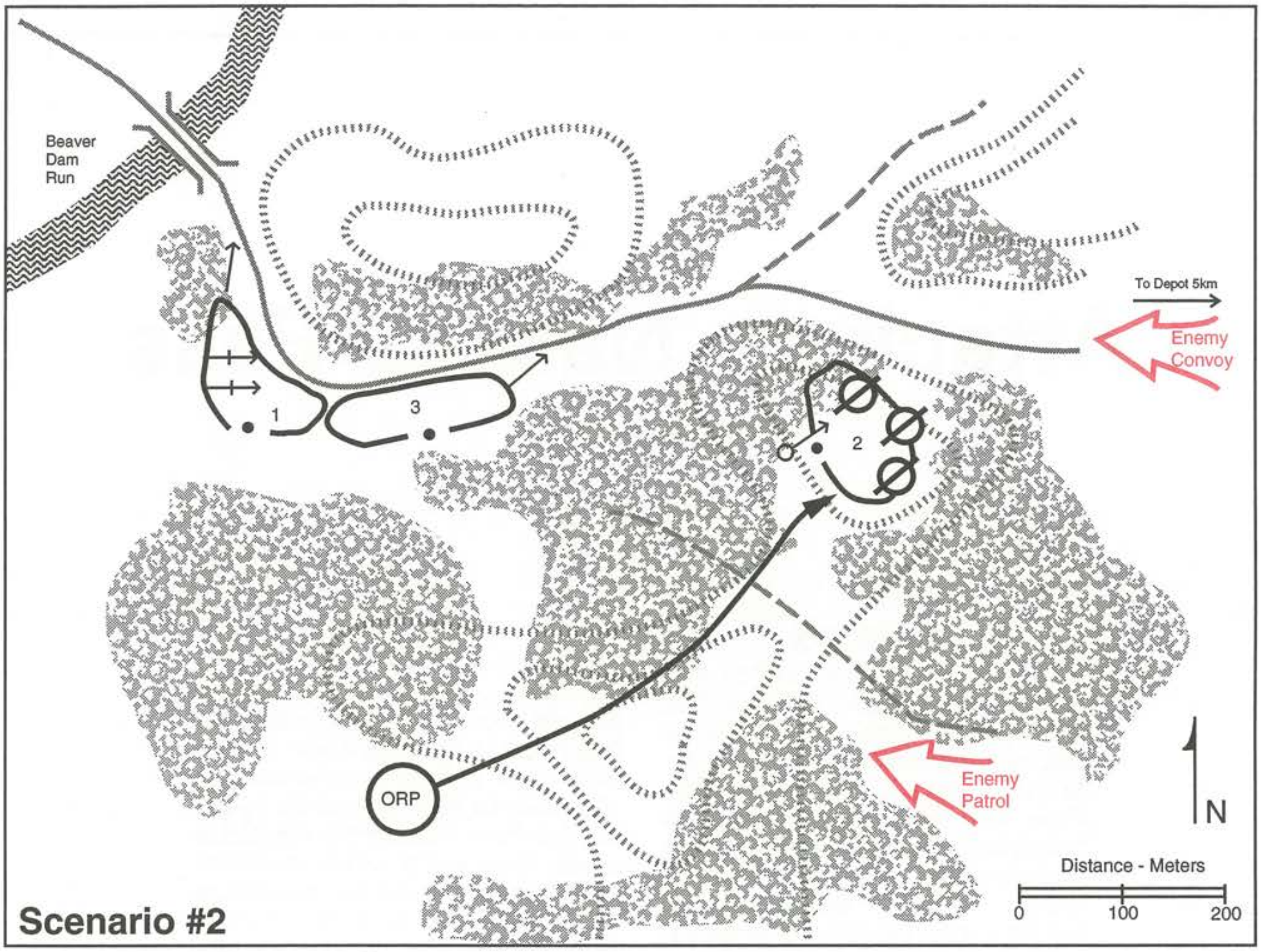
"Negative," you say. As you try to repeat your message, Cpl Turner taps you on the arm and points down the road to the east. The convoy approaches around a bend, about 300–400 yards away: two machinegun jeeps followed by at least seven trucks, and more coming into view, moving about 15–25 miles per hour.

In a couple of minutes, things are going to get interesting.

What do you do?

## REQUIREMENT

In a time limit of 5 minutes, describe your actions and issue the frag order you will give to your subordinates. Make sure to include the intent of your plan. Provide a sketch of your actions and an explanation.




For discussion see pp. 45-47

# Attack on Narrow Pass

## SITUATION

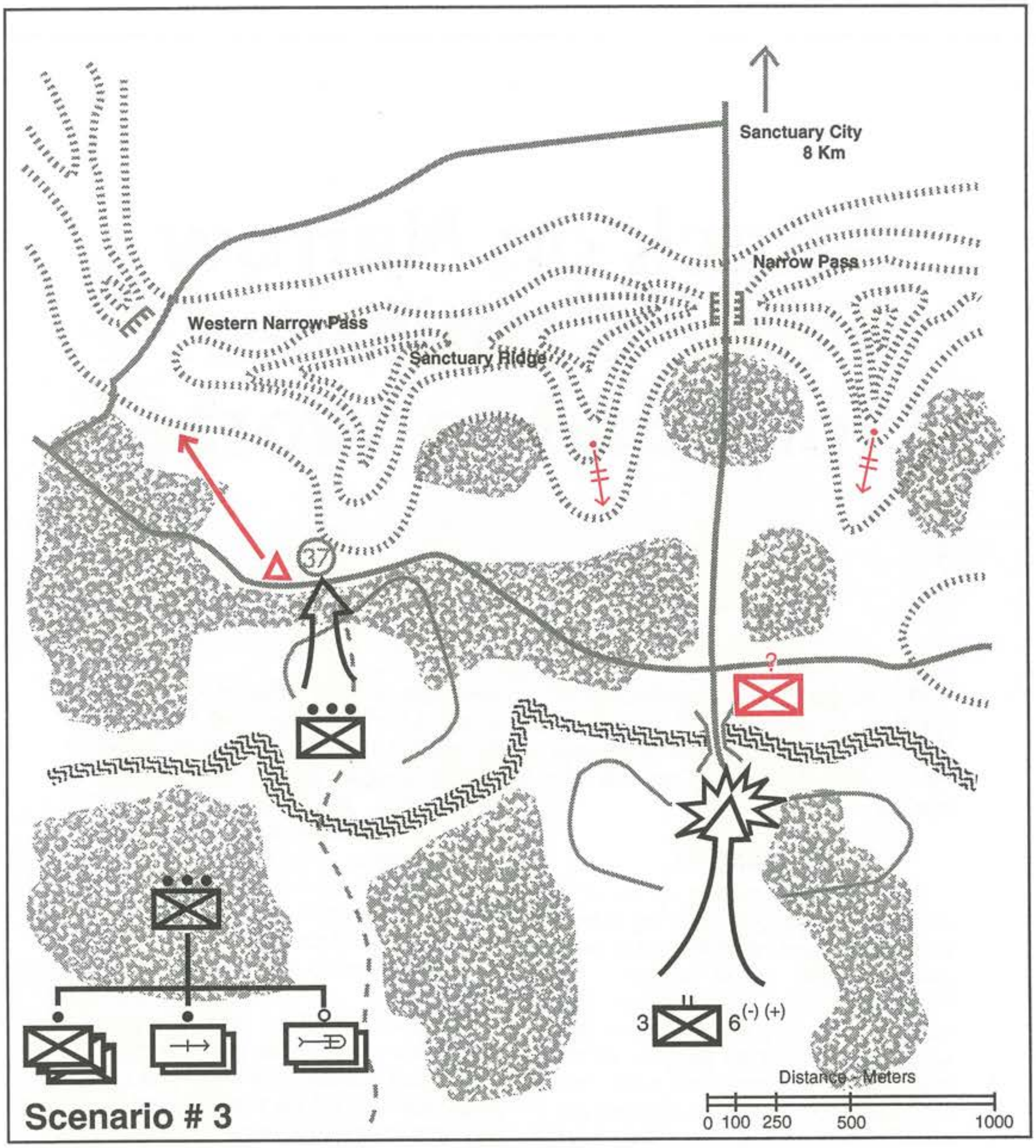
You are the commander of 1st Platoon, Company I, 3d Battalion, 6th Marines. 6th Marines have been attacking north with the intention of destroying enemy forces in Sanctuary Plain and have already landed a helicopterborne company in the plain near Sanctuary City. The helicopterborne force has become besieged, and 3/6 has the mission of launching a relief attack into the plain to reinforce the helicopterborne force and continue the offensive. Implied in this mission is forcing passage onto the plain. The terrain south of Sanctuary Ridge is generally rugged and undeveloped with thick vegetation and severe relief. The enemy you have been fighting is primarily infantry with small numbers of tanks. It is 2015; there is a full moon.

Your platoon—reinforced with two machinegun squads from weapons platoon and two Dragon teams (with night trackers) from weapons company—advances along the battalion's left flank with instructions to guard that flank. Moving parallel to a narrow foot trail—but not on it—you cross a dry, rocky gully about 3 to 4 feet deep and 20 meters wide without making contact. But as you approach Checkpoint 37 your point squad makes contact with what appears to be a listening post that immediately flees northwest toward the Western Narrow Pass. Moments later a major firefight breaks out in the thick woods to your east. From radio transmissions it is clear that the main body of the battalion has been halted by a significant enemy force and is taking casualties. Your best guess is that the engagement is taking place near the Narrow Bridge. From your position you can see several enemy machineguns on the ridge to your northeast opening up in support of the firefight. On the conduct of fire net you hear the battalion directing supporting arms onto the enemy position at the bridge. Transmissions on the tactical net are somewhat unclear, but it appears the battalion is attempting a right flanking movement against the enemy position. Except for the listening post that fled, there is no sign of enemy activity in your area. What do you do?

## REQUIREMENT

Within a 10-minute time limit, prepare any frag orders you would issue to your squad leaders and attachments, including your intent. Include any plans for the use of supporting arms, an overlay of your scheme, and any communications you would make with higher headquarters.

> Acting with initiative does not mean being a "loose cannon." It's important to coordinate up and down the chain and laterally. What reports will you make to higher headquarters?




For discusssion, see pp. 48-50.
Game appeared in *Marine Corps Gazette,* Mar91; solutions, May91.

# Attack on Narrow Pass, Continued: From Bad to Worse

This scenario is the continuation of Scenario #3 and is based on a common solution for that problem submitted by several *Marine Corps Gazette* readers.

## SITUATION

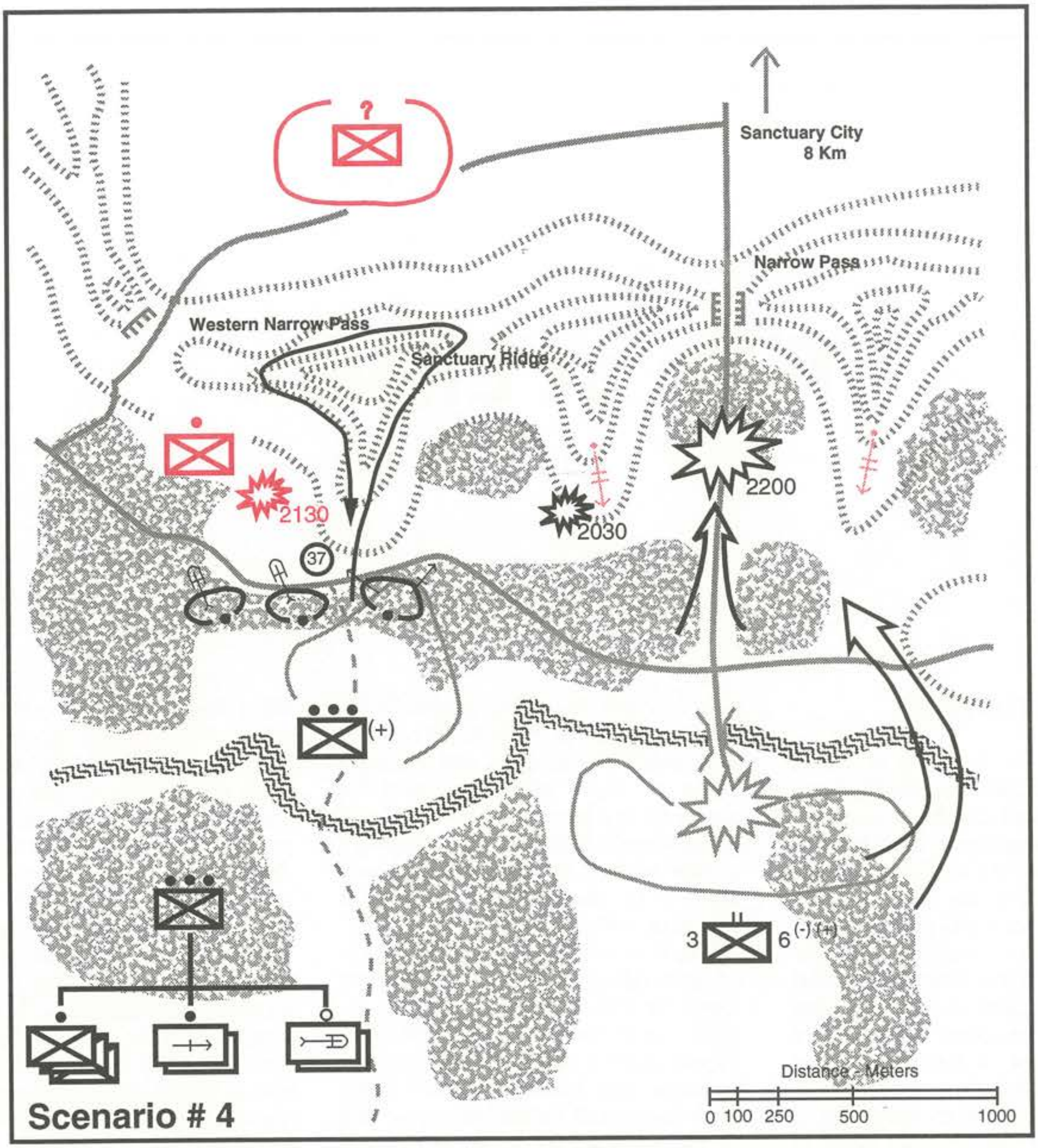
Based on the situation in Scenario #3, you contemplate moving into a position to assist battalion, but you decide that your orders to guard the flank are explicit and that you had best stay put. You set your three rifle squads in a blocking position in the trees along the east-west road near Checkpoint 37, preparing to repel any enemy approaching from the west. You decide to try to suppress the western enemy gun position with an attached machinegun squad, and you let battalion know that you can adjust supporting arms on the eastern enemy gun position. You also can't resist sending your platoon sergeant due north with a small reconnaissance patrol to check out the situation along the ridge.

The enemy machineguns fall silent as you suppress with supporting arms and your own machineguns. Battalion has successfully outflanked the enemy and is advancing north again. At about 2130 your platoon engages an enemy patrol of about squad size approaching from the northwest; the enemy patrol withdraws hurriedly whence it came. Checking the scene of the firefight, you recover two enemy corpses. Artillery impacts several hundred meters west of your position. That was about a half hour ago; you have had no enemy activity since then. Your platoon sergeant returns to report that he reached the ridge and reconnoitered a couple hundred meters each direction. The only contact he made was an enemy LP which fled west. He also reports the sound of enemy armor—a platoon or company at most, he estimates—revving up north of the ridge.

Suddenly, battalion comes under heavy fire as it nears Narrow Pass. The enemy machineguns that you engaged open up on the battalion again, this time from either flank. It is apparent that the enemy has a sizable force at the pass. From the radio traffic you discern that battalion has been hit hard: two companies are unable to advance and are taking casualties. Anxious to help, you contact battalion to offer your services. "Just wait out," the S-3 snaps agitatedly. "We've got other things to worry about now." The time is now 2200. What do you do?

## REQUIREMENT

Within a 5-minute time limit, prepare the frag order (if any) you would issue to your squad leaders and attachments, including the intent of your plan. Include any plans for the use of supporting arms, an overlay of any scheme of maneuver, and any further communications you would make with battalion. Then give a brief explanation of your rationale.




For discussion, see pp. 51-52.
Game appeared in *Marine Corps Gazette*, Sep91; solutions, Nov91

# 'Film at Eleven'

## SITUATION

You are the commanding officer of Company F, 2d Battalion, 3d Marines, fighting in an arid desert environment that offers exceptional mobility for wheeled and tracked vehicles. You are supported by a platoon of assault amphibious vehicles (AAVs), enough to mount your entire company. After intense fighting at the front for several weeks, the battalion commander has assigned your company to rear duty providing security for a mobile combat service support detachment (MCSSD). As the ground combat element (GCE) advances north, the MCSSD plans to move in that direction and establish a forward supply point at Oasis, some 25 kilometers north but still another 25 kilometers south of the front. While the front is generally to the north, there is no clear delineation between friendly and enemy territory; as a result, you long ago learned the importance of all-round security. Irregular enemy forces mounted on small trucks and equipped with heavy machineguns are known to operate in the area.

Oasis is the only source of water in the region. The local population lives in adobe dwellings, which will not normally withstand anything larger than small arms. The only masonry structures are the two-story community center and the pump house. In the center of town is a large plaza. Surrounding the buildings are irrigated fields of "short" crops that meet the needs of the local people. The local population is of the same ethnic group as the enemy, although their actual support for the enemy is sometimes less than enthusiastic.

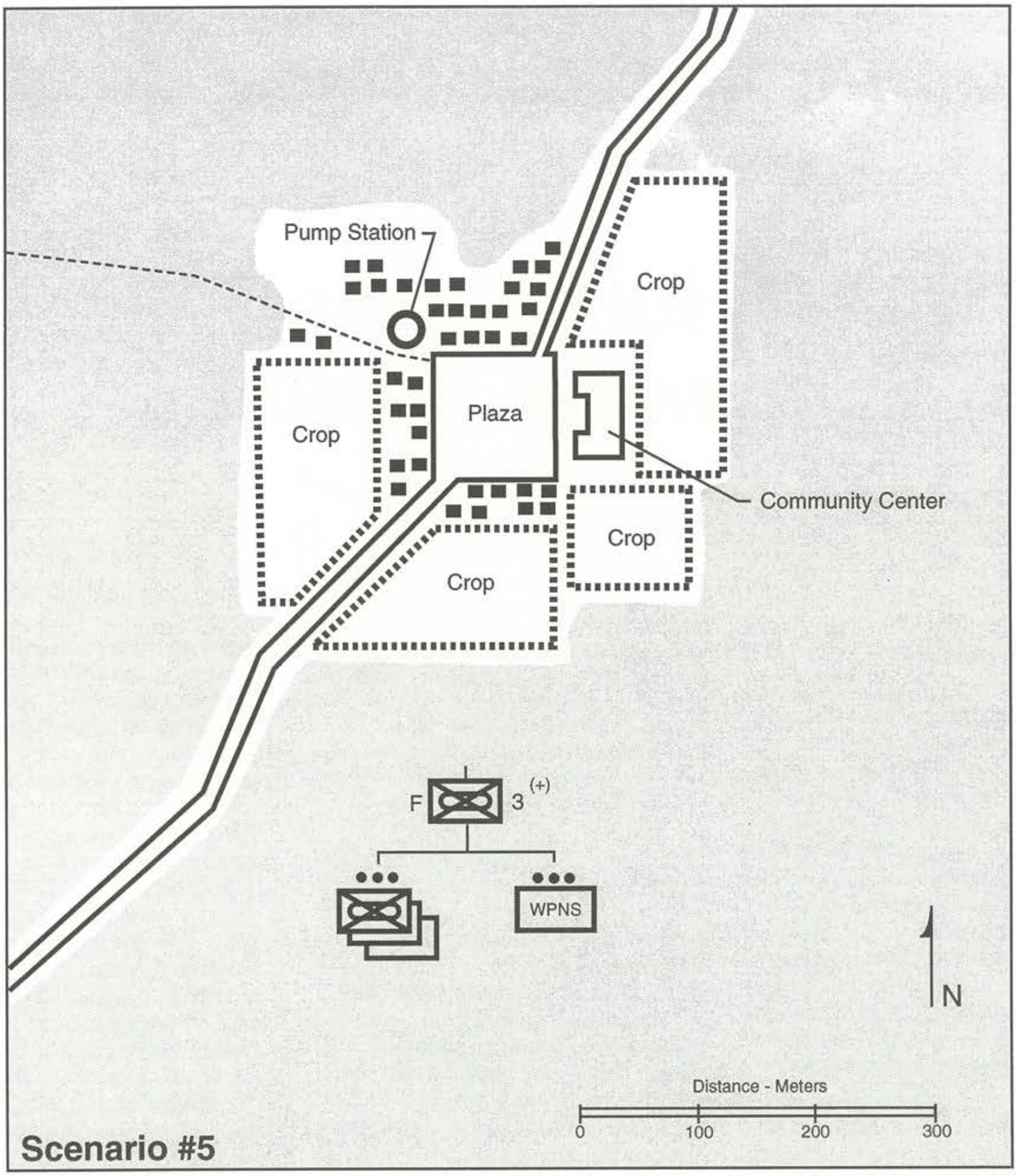
The time is 1400. The MCSSD commander tells you he wants to occupy Oasis by 1200 tomorrow, and he expects you to have the settlement completely secured by that time. From experience you know that each oasis town has a small militia force consisting of the adult males of the settlement, equipped with small arms, rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), machineguns, and possibly light mortars. The fighting skills of these units vary greatly. Some are looking for any excuse to lay down their arms; many fire off a few rounds to satisfy their sense of honor before surrendering; only a few fight tenaciously. However, there seems to be no way of anticipating how the forces will act from one settlement to the next. In the case of Oasis, the S-2 estimates the militia to be betwen 100-150 strong. He can tell you nothing more than that.

As you are grumbling about the lineage of the S-2, the MCSSD commander comes up to you and says: "One more thing; there's a cable TV news team covering our operation that's looking for a little action. I've told them they can accompany you as you secure the Oasis. Cooperate with them, but keep them out of trouble." The news team comes equipped with its own recognizable camera van. You are introduced to the correspondent, whose smug, mustachioed face you recognize. He says: "Let's get something straight, Captain. The public has a right to know what's going on over here. I want to be right where the action is. If you try to keep me from doing my job, it could be embarrassing for you."

## REQUIREMENT

You do not feel particularly friendly toward the news team, but you have other things to worry about. How will you approach the problem of securing Oasis? You're glad that for once you've got a little time to plan your operation, so take 20 minutes. Write the order you will issue to your rifle platoons and weapons sections and your instructions for the camera crew. Include a statement of your intent, a focus of efforts, any plans for supporting fires, and an overlay of your plan. Then provide an explanation of the rationale for your plan.

Does the enemy have a critical vulnerability you can exploit?




For discussion see pp. 53-55.
Game appeared in *Marine Corps Gazette*, Jun90; solutions, Aug90

# Hole in the Trowzer Pocket

## SITUATION

You are the commander of Company K, 3d Battalion, 24th Marines, fighting in rolling, wooded terrain against enemy foot infantry forces. Regiment has been attacking generally south for over 2 weeks. A sizable enemy force has managed to hold out, creating a salient in the vicinity of the town of Trowzer. You are called to the battalion command post for instructions, where you learn that regiment plans to destroy the enemy pocket by an encircling attack. The battalion commander gives you the following warning order on the regimental plan:

> The main enemy force is holed up in Trowzer to the south. Regiment intends to move one company around each of the enemy flanks under cover of darkness to occupy a blocking position on the low ridge south of Trowzer. At 0400, the other four companies [one battalion is in reserve] will attack south through Trowzer to crush the enemy against the BP. A classic hammer-and-anvil operation.
>
> Kilo, you will be part of the anvil. Commencing at 2100, you will infiltrate by Route Red around the eastern flank of the enemy to establish a BP in the vicinity of Hills 88 and 82, oriented north. Your left boundary is Trowzer Road exclusive. Coordinate on your left with Fox/2/24, who will be the other half of the anvil in the vicinity of Hill 81. Fox will be coming in from the west. Make face-to-face contact at the Inseam Creek Bridge. As the senior commander, the Fox CO is in overall command of the BP. Commencing 0300, destroy enemy forces in your sector trying to escape south out of the pocket. The detailed plan will follow.

Using the "Half Rule," you brief you platoon commanders and give them ample time to prepare. After the operations order arrives, you make minor adjustments to your plan and move out. You are able to move your company undetected around the enemy's flank and arrive in position by 0130. Using the established brevity code, you contact Fox Company by radio to let them know you are in position. "Roger that, same here," comes the reply. After giving your executive officer and artillery forward observer guidance to supervise the defensive fireplanning, you move to the bridge to coordinate with Fox, arriving at 0200. You wait 15 minutes but the Fox commander does not show up. You contact him again by radio and he replies: "Roger, I'm in position waiting for you." To the west you can see and hear Fox moving around in the vicinity of Hill 81. "Pretty poor noise and light discipline," you think to yourself. You decide to walk up to Hill 81 to find the company commander, but as you approach you decide the situation doesn't look right. The activity is not Fox at all; it is enemy infantry forces moving south in a steady flow out of the pocket. Fox Company is nowhere to be found. You're lucky to escape back toward your company without being detected.

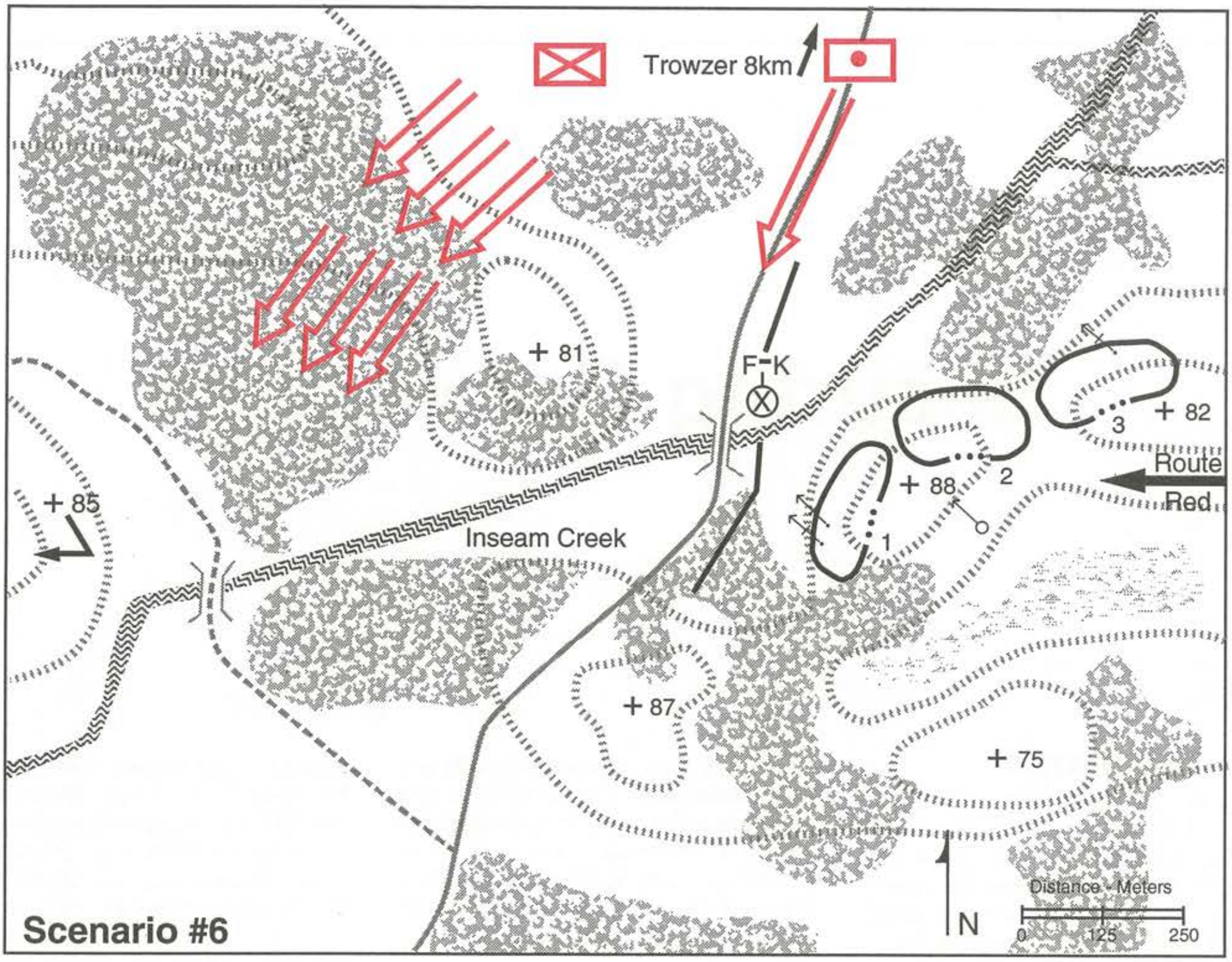
You are positive of your location. You call up Fox again, but the commander insists that he also is in the correct location on Hill 81. He reports no sign of enemy activity. It is now 0245. The enemy is by now moving south in increasing numbers just west of Hill 81; it is clear to you that this is part of an organized withdrawal. You explain the problem to battalion, which relays to regiment. But since Fox Company insists it is in the right position, about all regiment can say is: "Straighten it out. The attack goes on as scheduled."

About this time, your 1st Platoon reports an artillery unit heading south on the road from Trowzer, approaching the bridge. What do you do?

## REQUIREMENT

In a time limit of 5 minutes, give the orders you would pass to your subordinates, to include the intent of your plan and your focus of efforts. Provide a sketch of your plan, any guidance for supporting arms, and a brief explanation of your plan.

**Remember to keep in mind the intent of your higher commanders.**




For discussion, see pp. 56-58

# Securing Cam-Pljuna

## SITUATION

You are the commander of Company E, 2d Battalion, 2d Marines, conducting peacekeeping operations in a Third World country torn by ethnic civil war. The terrain is mountainous, rugged, and thickly vegetated. Most roads are vulnerable to ambush from the nearby high ground. Vehicles are restricted to roads; foot forces can move anywhere (though slowly and sometimes with difficulty) except the steepest terrain. Your region is controlled by a faction known as the Early Retirists, who are opposed to the majority local population and who are prone to mistreat the locals and to harass peacekeeping forces. The mountain city of Cam-Pljuna some 10–12 kilometers to your northwest is strategically important because it is a gateway to the mountainous interior and controls the main roads to the cities of Pendjetan and Bensjkula. All three cities have been cut off for a couple weeks and are in need of food and medical supplies. Cam-Pljuna is important also because it is one of the few places with enough open flatland for a large helicopter landing zone, through which relief supplies can be introduced into the interior. Cam-Pljuna is accessible to vehicles only by way of the narrow switchback road from the southeast.

The battalion commander calls you to the command post to tell you that battalion will undertake operations intended to relieve the cities under control of the Early Retirists. As the first phase of this campaign, he gives your company the following mission:

> In the next 48 hours, capture and secure the town of Cam-Pljuna in order to facilitate immediate relief operations by helicopter and/or vehicle and to facilitate subsequent operations to relieve Pendjetan and Bensjkula. You are the battalion's main effort.

The S-2 tells you that Cam-Pljuna normally has a population of several thousand, but it is unclear how many have fled the city in recent weeks. The local population is not expected to cause trouble but cannot be counted on for much assistance either. The permanent garrison of Early Retirist forces at Cam-Pljuna is estimated between 50–75. Their training and morale are estimated at poor-to-average. They are equipped with small arms, light machineguns and mortars. Their night-vision capability is limited. A motorized machinegun unit of four or five vehicles based at Pendjetan regularly patrols the route Pendjetan—Cam-Pljuna—Bensjkula. Any enemy reinforcements will come from Pendjetan. A flyover within the last 24 hours located antiair positions (twin-barrelled 23mm AA guns) on Hills 425 and 307, a mortar position on the western edge of town and prepared defenses (which may not all be permanently occupied) east and south of town. The Early Retirists regularly locate their positions among the local dwellings.

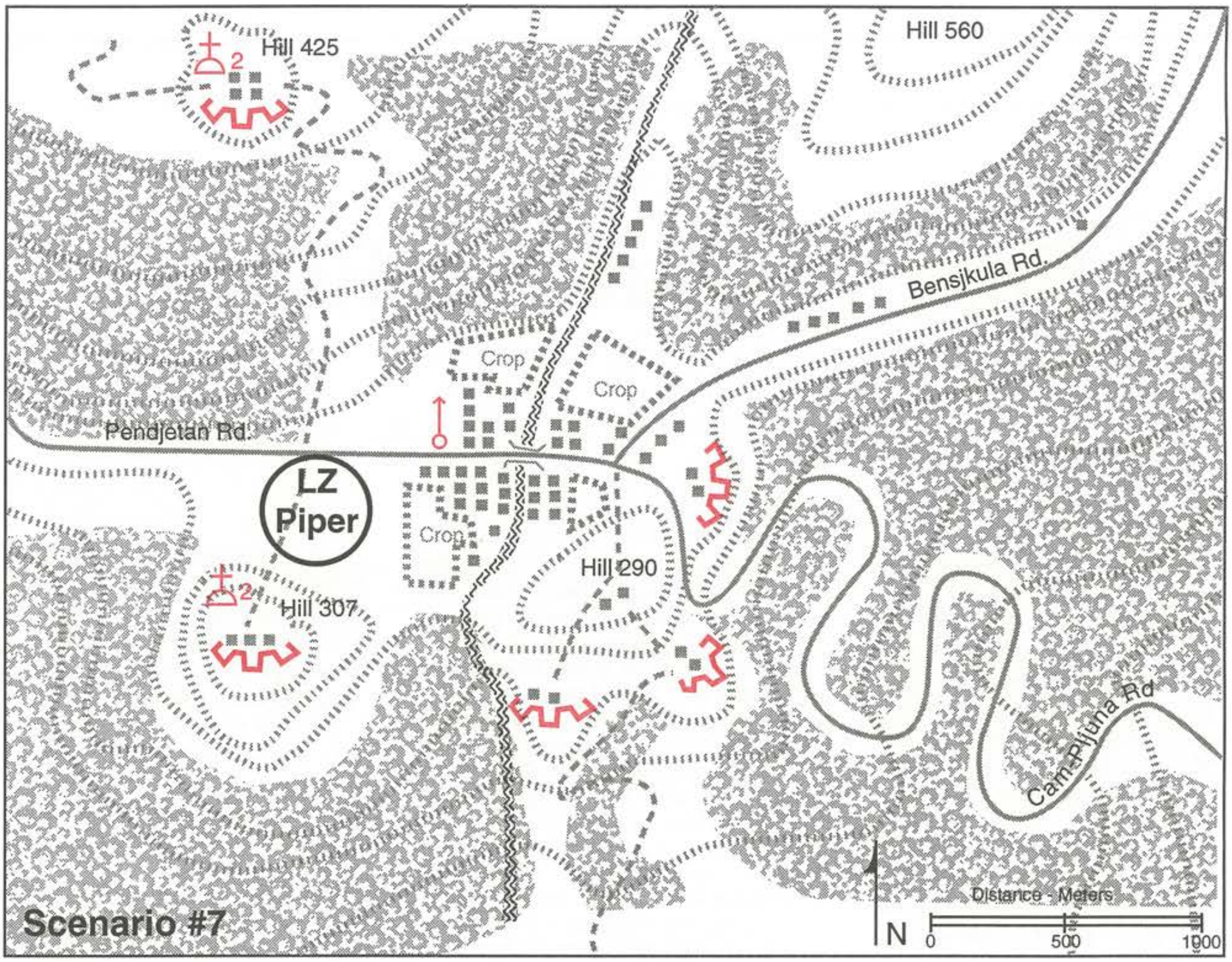
The battalion commander gives you this additional guidance:

- Minimize collateral damage to locals, their homes, and crops.
- It is not necessary to clear the Cam-Pljuna Road; follow-on forces will be responsible for their own route security.
- If you can secure the landing zone (LZ), battalion can reinforce with one company by helicopter within 3 hours.
- Any weapons company assets you require are available.

## REQUIREMENT

In a time limit of 30 minutes, develop the plan you would use to accomplish your mission. Remember to include your intent, focus of efforts, any plans for the use of supporting arms, and any coordinating instructions. Decide what weapons company assets you need. Then provide a sketch and give a brief explanation of your plan.

What weapons company assets do you need, and why?




For discussion, see pp. 59-60.

# Raid on Gazebo Ridge

## SITUATION

It is predawn, after a typically chaotic and bloody desert battle during Operation HOLY WARRIOR. You are the first sergeant of Company A, 2d Light Armored Infantry Battalion. The company's last remaining commissioned officer was killed in the opening moment's of yesterday's battle; since then you have commanded the company. As of this morning, Alfa Company consists of six light armored vehicles with 25mm chain guns (LAV-25s) each carrying only two or three scouts; two assault gun variants (LAV-AGs); two TOW variants (LAV-ATs); and an air-defense variant with Stinger and a 25mm gun (LAV-AD). The 25mm chain gun on the LAV-25 fires high explosive (HE) and armor piercing (AP) rounds with a maximum effective range (in your practical experience) of about 1,500 meters. The 105mm LAV-AG has an effective range of about 2,500 meters. The battalion has been in intense combat for 5 days running, and you are hoping for a day off to pull maintenance. No such luck; as your gunner heats up the coffee, a messenger arrives with instructions to report to the battalion command post immediately.

You arrive at the command vehicle in the dark; the battalion commander, a captain who began the campaign as your company commander, says with a smile, "Good morning, skipper." You don't like the way he is grinning at you; something must be up. Lucky he put you through all those tactical decision games, you muse. He gets down to business:

> We're here. [Pointing on the map with a pencil.] The Indigenous Division is here. [Another jab some 25 miles to the east.] The enemy is here on Gazebo ridge, in between, giving the Indigenous boys a beating. Our division has orders to relieve the pressure on the Indigenous Division. Unfortunately, fuel is low. Division has enough for a limited operation, which naturally will be us. We will make a raid directly into the enemy rear while the rest of the division pulls back for replenishment. First sergeant, your boys will be on the right; I can give you a section of two TOW Cobras in direct support. Bravo on the left; Charlie and Delta are reserves, on the right and left respectively. Initial main effort is Alfa. We'll have one battery of self-propelled arty in direct support.
>
> I can't give you any instructions about what to do until we meet the enemy. If in doubt, raise as much havoc as you can—mindful of the fuel situation—but do not get committed to a set battle. If the enemy strikes back in force, pull back; use your superior speed to break contact. But it's imperative that you act boldly to take some pressure off our friends in the east. We move out in one hour. Any questions?

You arrange with the Cobras to hover out of sight to your rear until called and organize your force as shown on the sketch. Uncertain as to what you will encounter, you remind vehicle commanders of the company's "Do as I do; follow the leader" standing operating procedure.

In the approaching dawn, you approach the rear of the enemy position—a low, crescent-shaped escarpment—apparently unnoticed. You are less than 4 miles away. In the distance to your left you can see the vehicles of Bravo Company advancing in dispersed formation toward the enemy positions farther north. You see an enemy tank detach itself from a small cluster on the extreme left of the enemy position and move directly across your front to the other flank. Through your binoculars you see the enemy tank commander look over at you, apparently without recognition, and wave. You return the greeting.

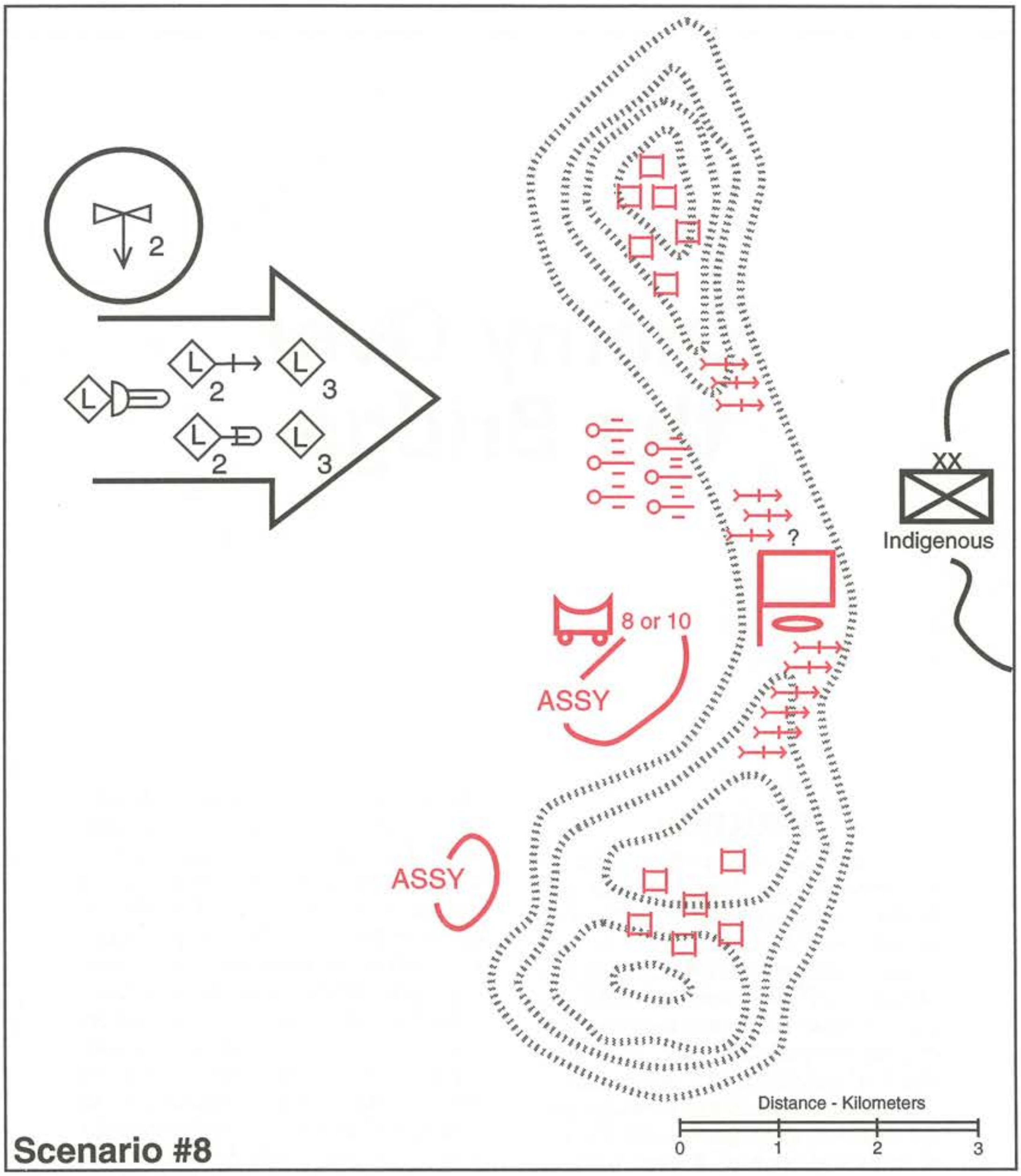
You try to raise battalion on the radio, but comm is dead. The Charlie Company commander tells you he will relay messages to battalion.

You see an artillery battery position in the hollow of the crescent pounding away at the friendly forces to the east. You see trucks and clusters of troops going disinterestedly about their morning chores. You see clusters of five or six tanks on either flank of the position, the crews milling about dismounted, and field guns lining the escarpment, also firing to the east. At the center of the crescent, among a cluster of smaller vehicles, you spot an enormous, two-story command vehicle, which you recognize as a captured U.S. model. Amazingly, the enemy seems unaware of, or at least unconcerned about, your approach.

You are now nearly within the horns of the crescent. The cluster of enemy tanks on the far left starts to show signs of life; one by one you see the diesel signatures of the engines revving up. There is a sudden flurry of activity around the tanks. You sense it is the moment of truth. . . .

## REQUIREMENT

In a time limit of 5 minutes, describe the action you will take in the form of the fragmentary order you will issue to your subordinates. Make sure to describe your intent and designate your focus of efforts. Include an overlay and a brief explanation of your plan.




For discussion, see pp. 61-63.
Game appeared in *Marine Corps Gazette,* Sep90; solution, Nov90.

# Enemy Over the Bridge

## SITUATION

You are the commanding officer of 2d Battalion, 6th Marines. Your battalion consists of two rifle companies on foot, one rifle company on trucks, a weapons company, a tank company (minus), and a TOW section on HMMWVs. The Dragons and heavy machineguns of your weapons company have been attached out to the rifle companies.

Friendly forces hold the bridge and the riverline. (You understand the river to be unfordable.) Reconnaissance elements are operating north of the river. Tomorrow morning the division begins a major offensive north across the river, with the division's focus of efforts in 6th Marines' zone. Your battalion will spearhead the regiment's attack, and as such will be the initial regimental focus of effort.

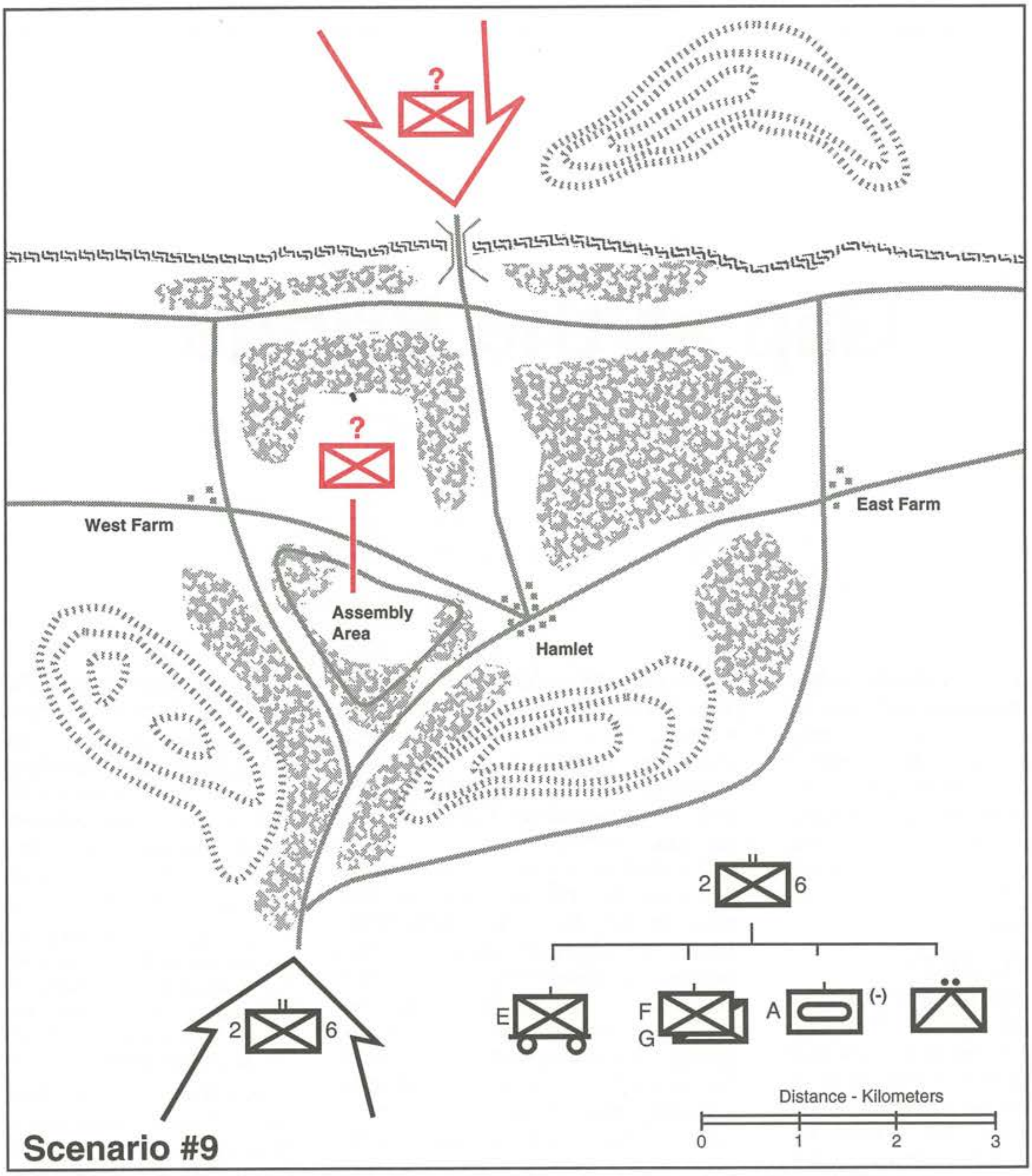
You are to occupy the assembly area shown on the map west of Hamlet in preparation for the morning attack across the river commencing at 0400. You are moving north toward the assembly area as shown. At 2000, your surveillance and target acquisition (STA) platoon, which is forward reconnoitering the route, reports enemy infantry occupying your assembly area in strength and continuing to reinforce. The size of these enemy units is unknown but estimated to be at least a company. Further, the STA platoon commander reports he has just met a reconnaissance team that was operating north of the river but has been forced south across the river under fire. The reconnaissance team leader reports there is no sign of friendly forces holding the riverline or the bridge and that enemy infantry units with some light vehicles have been moving across the bridge for at least 30 minutes. This is all the information the STA and reconnaissance Marines can tell you.

As the battalion commander, what will you do?

## REQUIREMENT

Within a 5-minute time limit, give your solution in the form of the fragmentary order you would issue to your subordinates—to include the intent behind your plan, your focus of efforts and any use of supporting arms—and support it with an overlay sketch. Then give a brief explanation of the reasons behind your decision.

Ask yourself, "What is the critical element in this situation?"




For discussion, see pp. 64-67.
Game appeared in *Marine Corps Gazette,* Apr90; solutions, Jun90.

# Gap at the Bridge

Knowing your enemy means understanding his capabilities and general intentions. But it also means seeing things the way he sees them, thinking the way he thinks, with the aim of anticipating his actions and thereby gaining the upper hand. This situation is the same as in Scenario #9 with one very significant difference: This time you are the enemy.

## SITUATION

You are the commanding officer of 1st Battalion, 5th Marines. Your battalion consists of one reinforced rifle company on trucks, two reinforced rifle companies on foot, a tank platoon and an antitank (TOW) section on HMMWVs. The Dragons and heavy machineguns of your weapons company are attached out to the companies. The division is temporarily halted, but the division commander plans to resume the offensive toward the south as soon as logistics can be brought forward. You have been operating north of the river against enemy reconnaissance and security elements. The enemy holds the riverline and the bridge in strength. (You understand the river to be unfordable.) Intelligence indicates that the enemy is planning an imminent offensive north across the river—sooner than your division can be ready to attack in strength. Your mission, which gives you broad latitude in the manner of execution, it to take whatever actions you can to forestall or disrupt the enemy attack in your sector.

A patrol by one of your companies discovers that the enemy forces that were holding the bridge have withdrawn. The aggressive company commander has already begun to infiltrate his company across the bridge. You decide to exploit the situation by getting your entire battalion south of the river with an eye toward mounting a spoiling attack. In the process, one of your companies has an engagement near the bridge with an enemy scout car, which flees west along the river road. You contact regiment and explain the actions you have set in motion. The colonel tells you he will reinforce with all the forces he can muster; infantry and tanks will begin to arrive in 2 to 3 hours. He designates your battalion as the main effort. You have the priority of fires for all supporting arms, he tells you.

The time is about 2000; darkness is descending quickly. Elements of your surveillance and target acquisition (STA) platoon report that Hamlet shows no signs of enemy activity. As your leading company moves into the triangular wood west of Hamlet, another STA team located on the high ground southwest of the wood reports an enemy column approaching from the south headed toward your position. The STA team sends the following report:

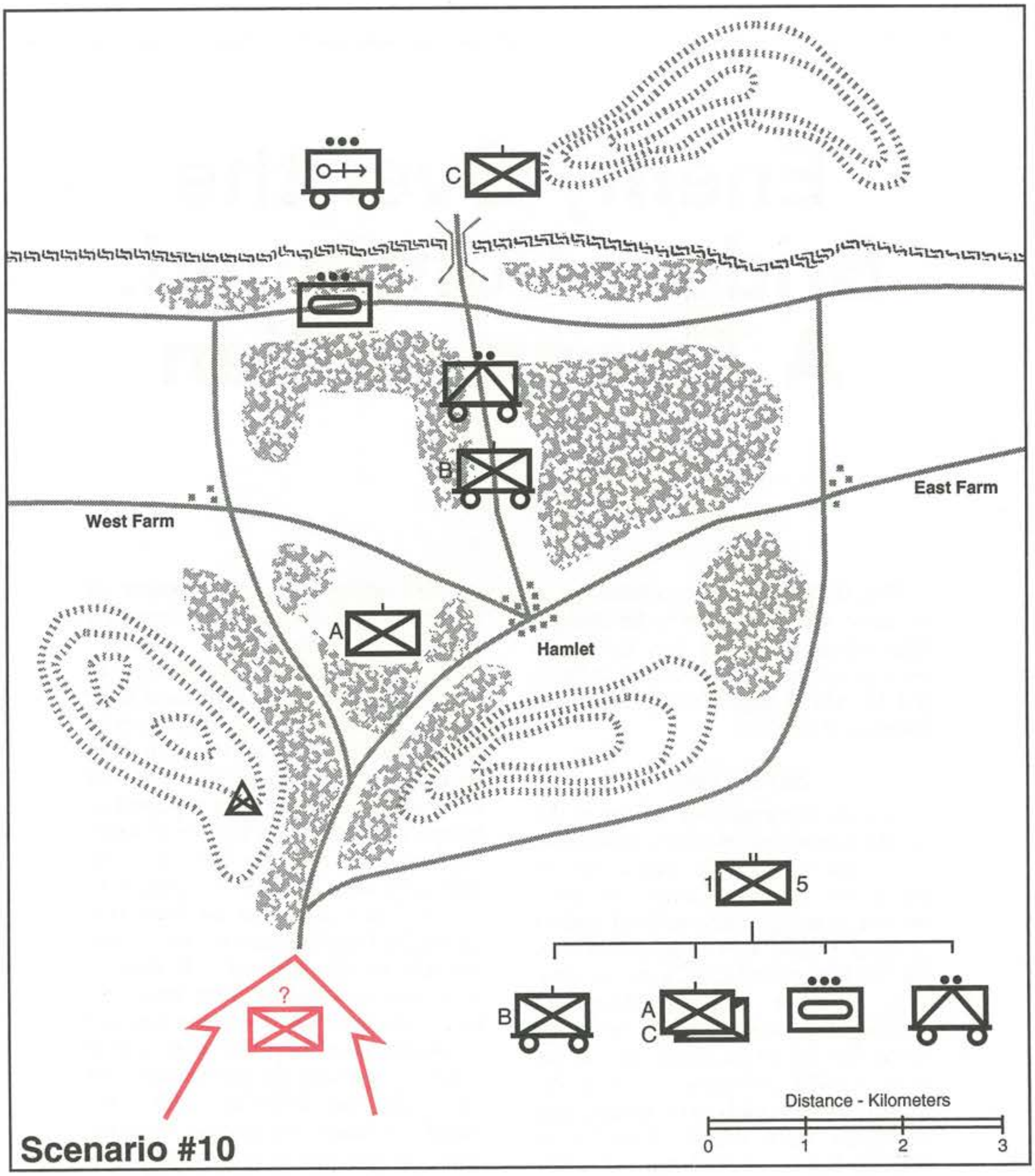
> Enemy force, estimate at least battalion strength, moving north on Hamlet road, at the intersection south of the pass; covered trucks, jeeps, infantry on foot; I can hear tanks in the distance but do not have a visual.

Simultaneously, a short firefight breaks out with what appears to be an enemy patrol moving into the triangular wood from the south. You suspect it may be the advance guard of the enemy column. As the battalion commander, what do you opt to do?

## REQUIREMENT

Within a 5-minute time limit, give your solution in the form of the frag order you would issue to your subordinates and support it with an overlay sketch. Then write a brief explanation of your actions, giving the key considerations and assumptions that shaped your decision.

> How will knowing how you reacted to "Enemy Over the Bridge" (Scenario #9) influence your actions now that the combat boot is on the other foot?




For discussion, see pp. 68-70.
Game appeared in *Marine Corps Gazette*, Jul90; solutions, Sep90.

# Enemy Over the Bridge, Continued: A Thwarted Plan

This situation is the continuation of Scenario #9, "Enemy Over the Bridge." The actions described here are based on a solution to that problem submitted by Maj Claes Henrikson of the Swedish Army.

## SITUATION

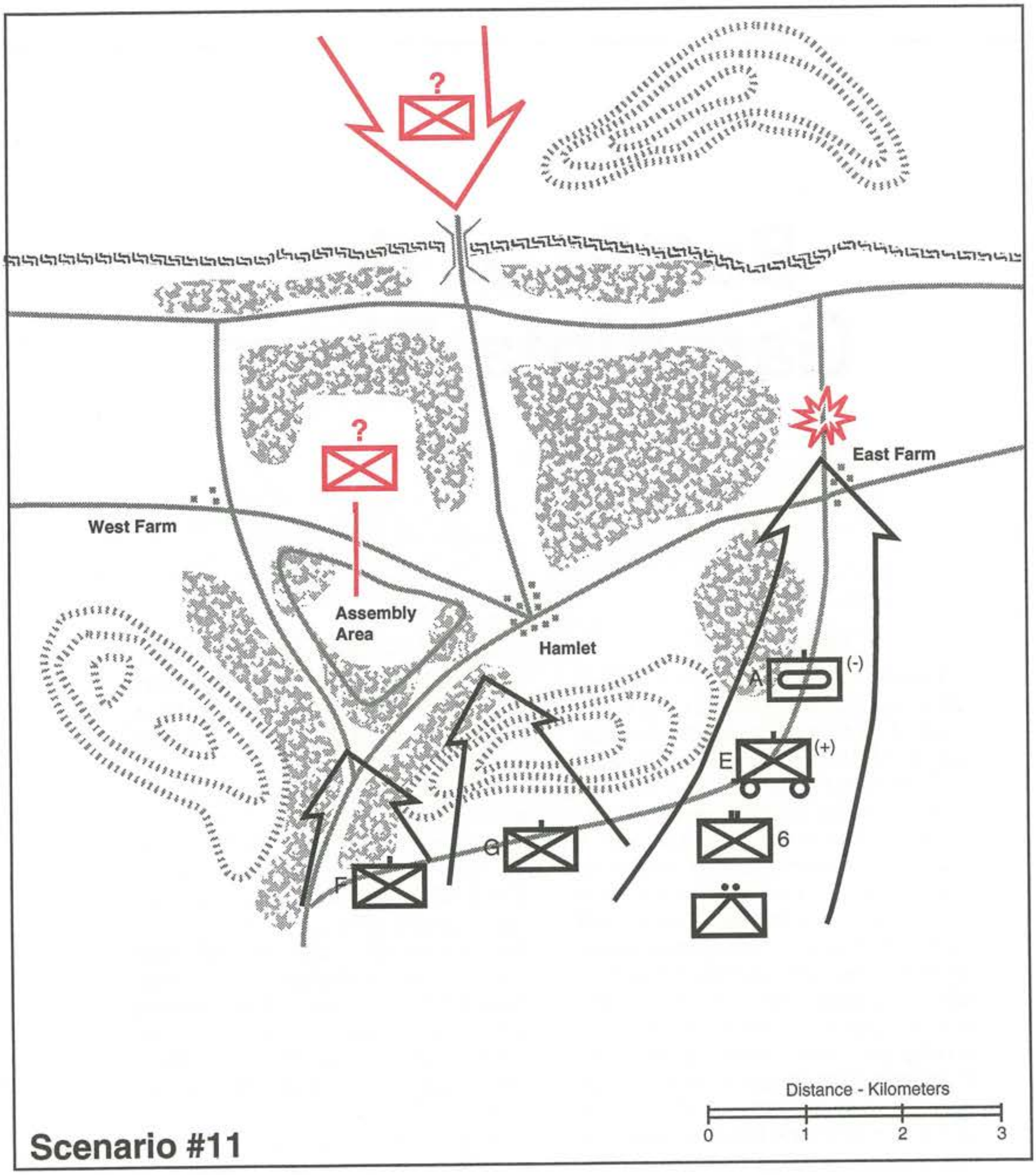
You are the executive officer of the 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, consisting of a reinforced rifle company on trucks, two reinforced rifle companies on foot, a tank company (minus), and an antitank (TOW) section on HMMWVs. As the lead element in a major division offensive, your battalion was moving to an assembly area in preparation for an attack north across the river at 0400 tomorrow morning. Although the assembly area, bridge, and riverbank were supposed to be in friendly hands, at 2000 your battalion discovered this was not the case. An enemy force of at least company size has seized the bridge and occupied your assembly area.

Recognizing the importance of the bridge and the need to move at once if the division attack is to proceed as scheduled, the battalion commander directed the mobile force of Company E (in trucks), supported by Company A (tanks) and the TOW section to attack the bridge by East Farm Road within one hour. As this was the main effort, he accompanied the force with his mobile command group. Companies F and G were directed to attack immediately to the northwest across East Hill toward Hamlet, the original assembly area and West Farm. The intent of this attack was to gain control of the main roads leading south, protect the deployment and advance of the main effort, and divert the enemy's attention from the bridge.

As executive officer, you moved behind Company F and were coordinating the attack of the two companies in the south. Briefing and preparation for the attack by both mobile and foot elements took longer than expected as troops were tired and had been looking forward to resupply and rest in the assembly area. At 2130 Company G reported that elements on East Hill heard loud explosions and an intense firefight to the northeast. It seemed clear that the mobile force had contacted the enemy, but neither you nor Company G on East Hill were able to raise anyone with the mobile force on any radio net. Periodic small arms could be heard for several minutes, then artillery began impacting in the vicinity of East Farm. At approximately the same time, Company F reported contact with the enemy south of the original assembly area. At about 2145, you receive a garbled, panicky report from a radio operator on the conduct of fire net. The mobile force has been ambushed with heavy casualties. It is stopped on the road, disorganized, and now under artillery fire. As the battalion executive officer, what do you do?

## REQUIREMENT

Within a 10-minute time limit respond by developing the instructions or frag order you would issue and the reports you would make. Explain the rationale supporting your decisions and provide a sketch map depicting your decisions.




For discussion, see pp. 71-73.
Game appeared in *Marine Corps Gazette*, Oct90; solutions, Dec90.

# Battle of the Garagiola River

## SITUATION

You are the commander of 3d Battalion, 4th Marines consisting of Companies I and K on assault amphibious vehicles (AAVs) near the Garagiola River, Company L on trucks at Androida, a light armored reconnaissance (LAR) company west of the river, and a tank company in reserve east of Androida. The TOW section is moving with Company L. For the last 2 weeks you have been facing superior enemy mechanized forces and have been forced to fall back from west to east, slowly wearing down the enemy while conserving your own combat power. You have learned that the enemy force opposing you is a mechanized regiment consisting of a tank battalion and two mechanized infantry battalions. Enemy tactics emphasize attacking aggressively upon contact and maintaining the momentum. The enemy will generally try to overrun resistance with tanks and prefers to dismount infantry only when necessary for close combat.

Poor visibility due to heavy fog lately has obscured the enemy situation since the last engagement, after which you lost contact with the enemy. While your battalion is halted along the river, your LAR company moves west to reestablish contact.

Steep banks make it infeasible for your AAVs to swim the river. Your mission is to defeat any enemy forces in your zone or, failing that, at a minimum to delay and disrupt the enemy advance.

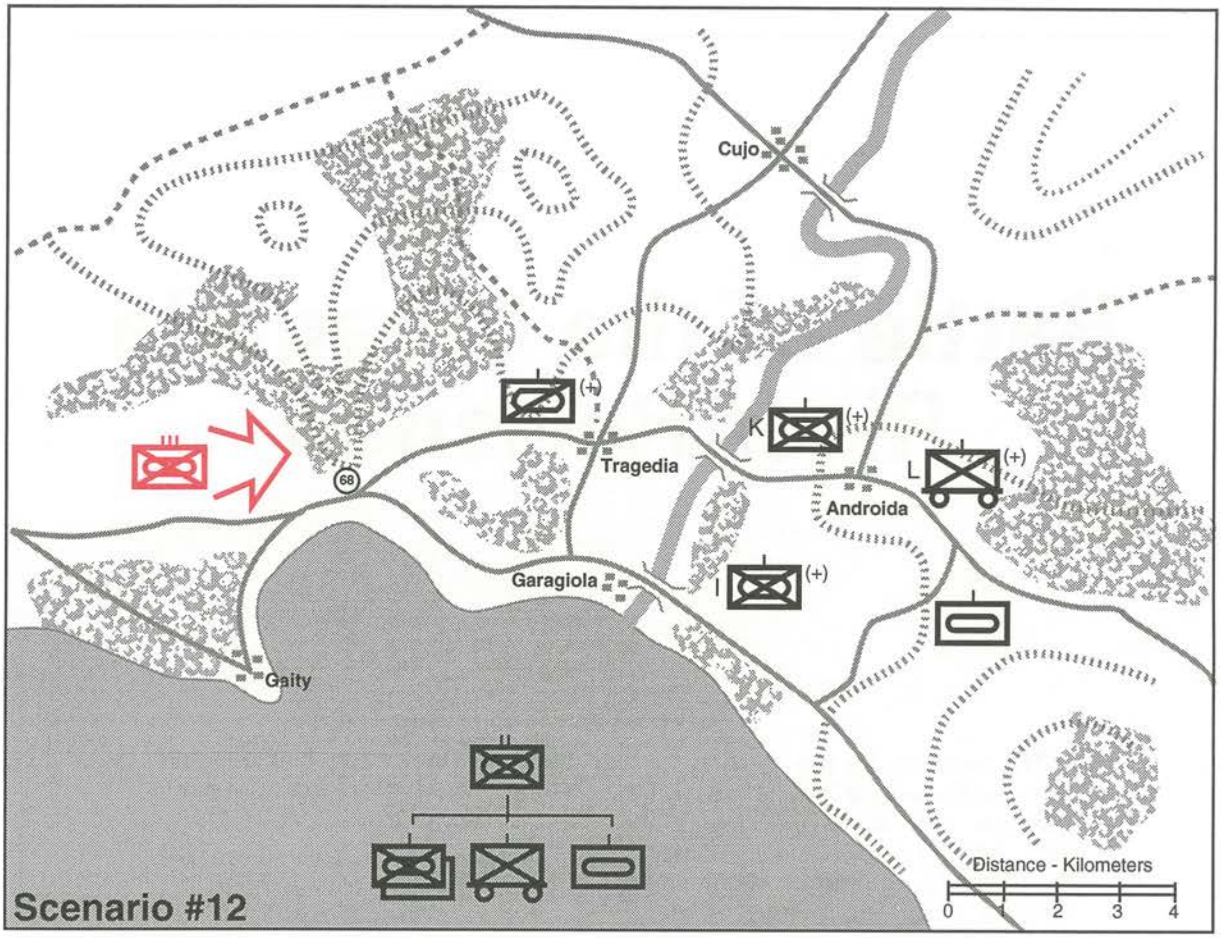
As your LAR company passes westward through Tragedia, it reports a sizable enemy mechanized force to the west approaching Checkpoint 68. The LAR company estimates an enemy regiment with a tank battalion in the lead. At this stage the LAR commander does not believe he has been detected by the enemy. Your artillery liaison officer assures you he can get massed fire support. Your air officer says he can get you "a couple of sorties of FA-18s."

At this rate, enemy tanks will be approaching Tragedia or Garagiola in about 30 minutes. What are your orders, Colonel?

## REQUIREMENT

Time is critical, but since you have already been considering the possibility of a battle along the Garagiola for a couple of days now, you don't feel rushed. So go ahead and take 12 minutes to develop the orders you would pass to your subordinates. Make sure to include any guidance for supporting arms and a sketch of your plan. Then provide a brief explanation.

> Does your frag order include a mission statement? a statement of intent? a concept of operations? tasks for subordinate units? a designated main effort?




For discussion, see pp. 74-77.
Game appeared in Marine Corps Gazette, Oct92; solutions, Dec92.

# Battle of the Garagiola River Revisited

The situation for this game is the same as Scenario #12, only it is seen this time from the enemy's point of view. As with Scenarios #9 and #10, the purpose is to illustrate the importance of trying to understand an enemy by seeing the situation through his binoculars.

## SITUATION

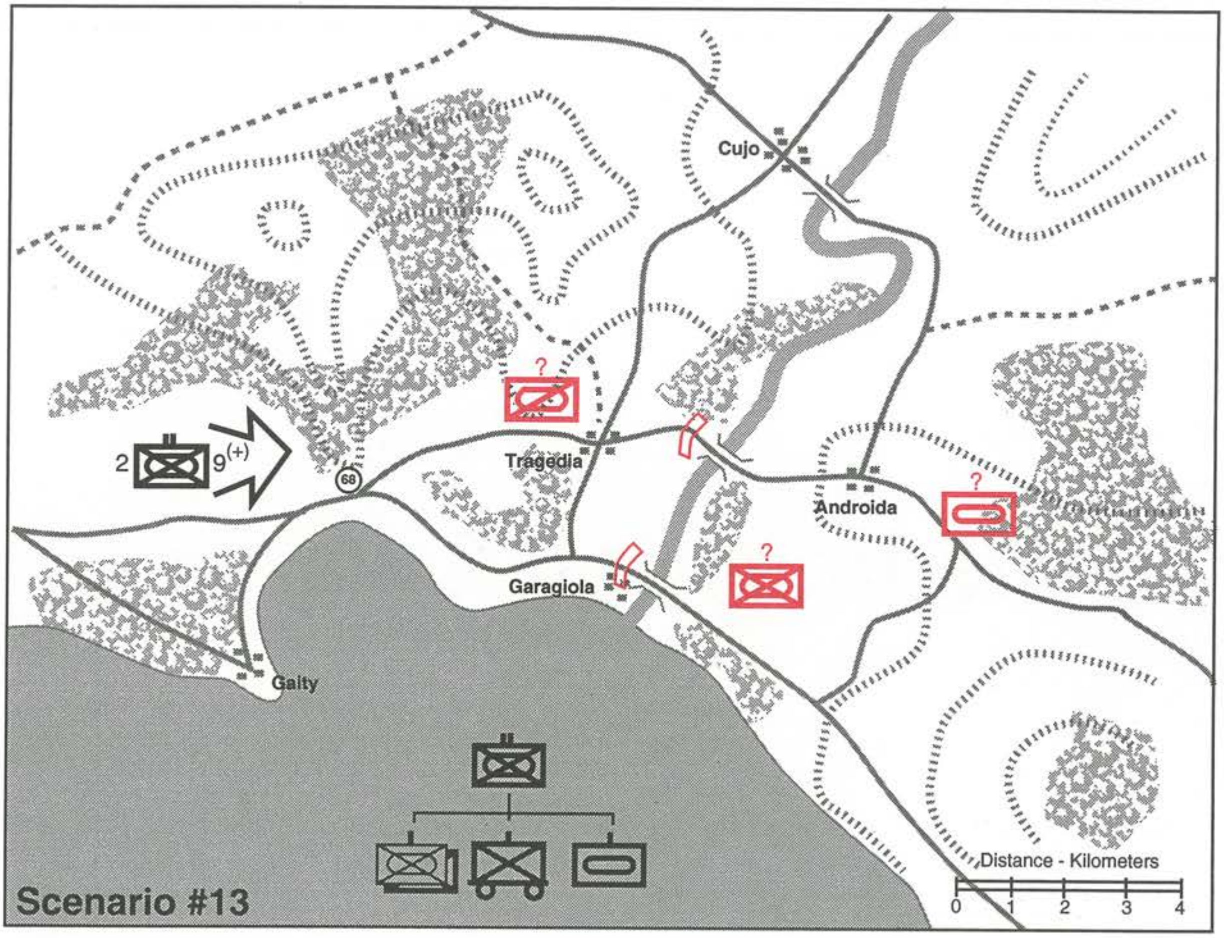
You are the commander of 2d Battalion, 9th Marines advancing generally east along the lakeshore as part of the regiment. Your battalion includes Companies E and F on assault amphibious vehicles (AAVs), Company G on trucks, and an antitank (TOW) section on HMMWVs. The Dragons and heavy machineguns from your Weapons Company are attached to the companies. For the last 10 days the regiment has been advancing against an enemy tank-mechanized force of battalion strength. The enemy has been waging an effective and clever delaying action, fighting tenaciously from delaying positions, making effective use of terrain and supporting arms, but disengaging and falling back before the regiment can bring about a decisive engagement. At the last engagement, the enemy managed to give the lead battalion a bloody nose before breaking contact. Thick fog since then has obscured the enemy situation. Frustrated over the slow rate of advance and inability to force the enemy into battle, the regimental commander moves your battalion into the lead and attaches a tank company His instructions to you are:

> Attack aggressively, force a crossing of the Garagiola River as quickly as possible to facilitate the continuation of the advance, and crush the enemy force opposing us once and for all. My goal is to quickly create a secure bridgehead and an open road to the east. The 1st and Tank Battalions, in reserve, will be ready to reinforce and exploit your success.

Intelligence indicates that the enemy has fallen back through Tragedia and Garagiola and is preparing positions along the Garagiola River, which has steep banks that make it impassable to any vehicles. Additionally, enemy tanks have been spotted near Androida. As your leading mechanized company approaches Checkpoint 68, you receive a report of enemy armored reconnaissance (with antitank missiles) at Tragedia. Within the next half hour your battalion will be engaged. What are your orders, Colonel?

## REQUIREMENT

Although time is short, you have been thinking about how to get across the Garagiola River for some time, so you already have some ideas. Take 10 minutes to finish up the orders you would pass to your subordinates. Make sure to include your intent, focus of efforts, and any guidance for the use of supporting arms. Provide a sketch and a brief explanation of your plan.




For discussion, see pp. 78-80.
Game appeared in the *Marine Corps Gazette,* Dec92; solutions, Feb93.

# Battle of the Dadmamian Swamp

## SITUATION

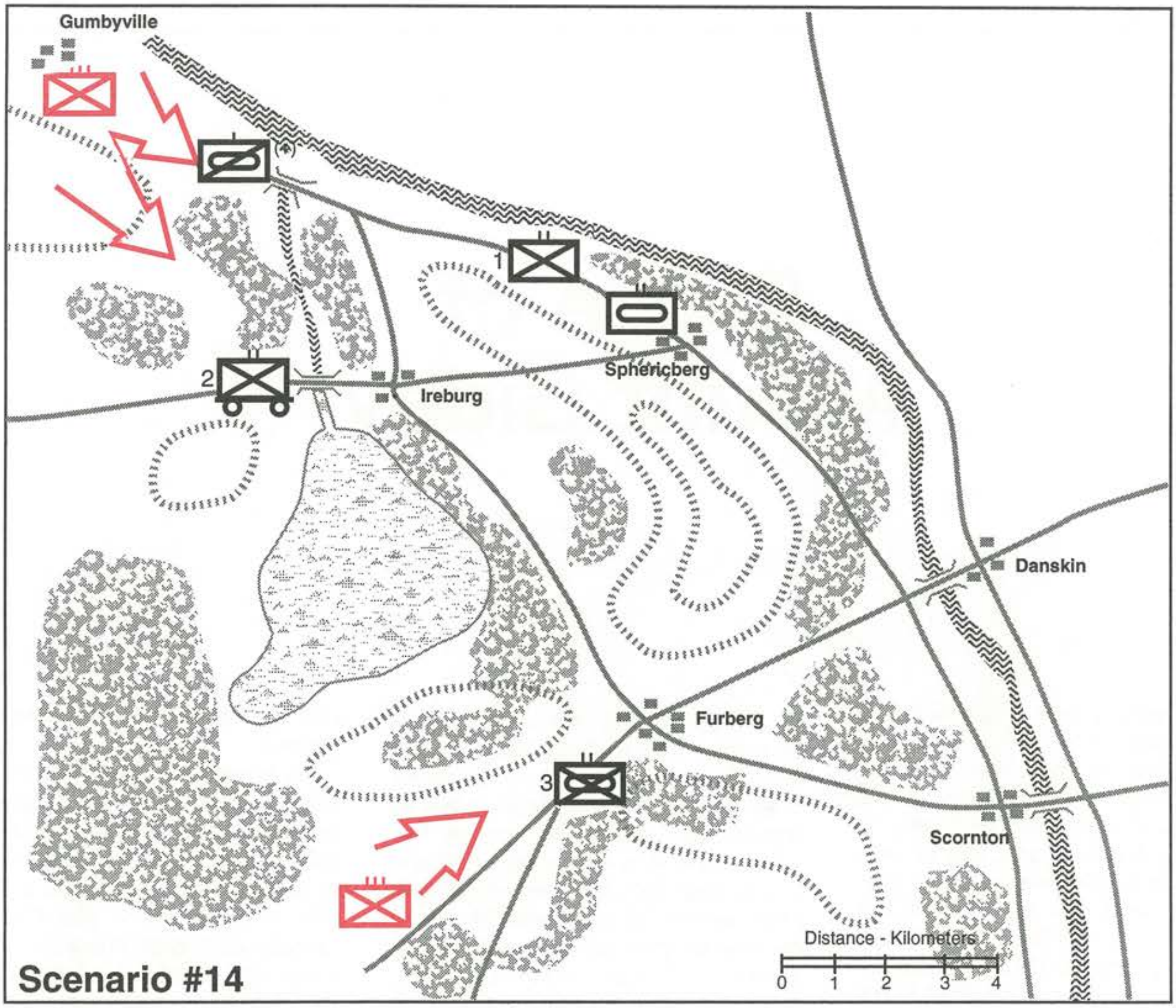
You are the commanding officer of the 4th Marines, which consists of two battalions on trucks, one battalion on assault amphibious vehicles (AAVs), a tank battalion, and a reinforced light armored infantry (LAI) company. You are west of the river with the mission of holding a bridgehead until reinforcements can arrive from the east in about 72 hours.

An enemy unit, which consists of infantry reinforced with limited numbers of tanks, is advancing generally from the west. An enemy regiment battered your 1st Battalion 24 hours ago in an engagement west of Gumbyville. Following that action, 1st Battalion withdrew east across the Dadmamian Creek. You now hold the bridges across the creek with 2d Battalion and the LAI company. The tank battalion is in reserve near Sphericberg. Your 3d Battalion protects the southern flank near Furburg. While the first enemy regiment occupies Gumbyville, 3d Battalion reports that another enemy infantry regiment is marching on Furburg from the southwest; 3d Battalion's security elements are beginning to fall back under pressure. It is exactly the situation you have been contemplating for the last 48 hours, so you have some pretty good ideas what to do. What are your orders, Colonel?

## REQUIREMENT

Since you have been planning for this contingency for some time, it should not take you long to issue your orders. So take 10 minutes. Give the orders you would pass to your subordinate units. Describe your intent and designate a focus of effort. Provide a sketch of your plan, any guidance for supporting arms and a brief explanation of your rationale.

Can you identify the historical case that this scenario is based on?




For discussion, see pp. 81-83.
Game appeared in the *Marine Corps Gazette*, Mar93; solutions, May93.

# Battle of Mount Giddy

This scenario is a little different from previous ones for a couple of reasons. First, it is of a broader scope than previous scenarios; you might even argue that it verges on being an *operational* decision game instead of a purely tactical one. Second, it is a Marine air-ground task force (MAGTF) problem—designed for a Marine expeditionary brigade (MEB) commander—in which the requirement is for the broad integration of ground, air, and logistics elements rather than just the tactical control of subordinate units on the ground.

## SITUATION

You are a MEB commander fighting in a coastal desert that offers excellent mobility and freedom for mechanized and motorized forces save for the ridgelines, which tend to canalize vehicle movement. The theater strategy calls for the Joint Task Force (JTF)—of which the MEB is a part—to mount a major land offensive toward the north out of the Damoose region. The MEB's mission is to protect the JTF's southern flank, i.e., its rear, as the JTF attacks north. You are authorized to trade space for time as long as you deny the enemy the Damoose-Brut line, Brut being a key port and airfield and Damoose being a key logistics node.

Your MEB command element (CE) and brigade service support group (BSSG) are located at Damoose. Your aviation combat element (ACE) is located at Brute. The air situation is one of relative parity, the enemy being stronger in air defense assets, while you are stronger in offensive air assets. Your ground combat element (GCE) consists of a motorized infantry battalion (minus) in the vicinity of Mount Giddy, one battalion on assault amphibious vehicles near Gooselub, another along the railroad west of Bed Lake, a reinforced light armored infantry company guarding the right flank near Berra, and a tank battalion (minus) in reserve near Nevertheless. The enemy has superiority of roughly two to one in ground forces.

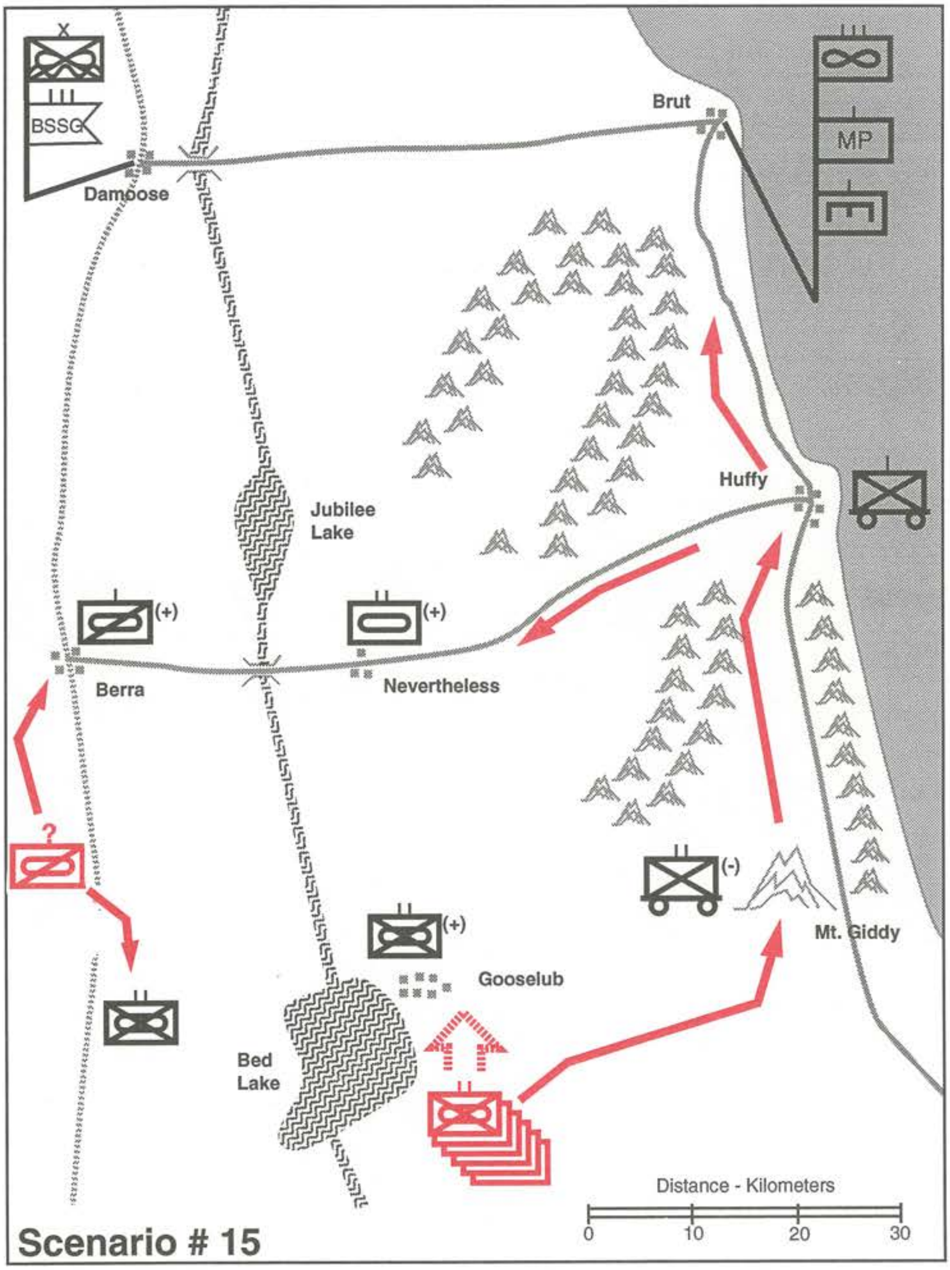
You plan to conduct a delaying action, trading space for time. You intend to fall back only under pressure, making the enemy pay for every inch of terrain but avoiding decisive engagement. Since yours is a subsidiary mission, you do not intend to force a decision but rather to forestall one. The JTF offensive has been underway for nearly a week and to this point the enemy on your front has played into your hands by remaining relatively inactive, probing but not threatening your forward defensive positions. He has irregular forces equipped with light vehicles operating out of the barren desert to the west who periodically try to cut the Damoose railroad, an important line of communication. Intelligence has been reporting a buildup of enemy armored and mechanized forces and supplies south of Gooselub over the last 48 hours. The G-2 anticipates the enemy will mount an offensive in that sector within the next 72 hours.

As it turns out, however, the enemy buildup in the south is actually a well executed deception. Instead of striking Gooselub, the enemy attacks in strength at Mount Giddy supported by massed offensive air power. The GCE commander also reports that the LAI company and mechanized battalion on the right flank are under attack but holding their own, as is the battalion at Gooselub. But he reports that he cannot make contact with the motorized battalion at Mount Giddy, which apparently has been overrun. Within 12 hours scattered situation reports indicate that enemy mechanized and armored forces have reached Nevertheless, where they are being engaged by elements of the reserve tank battalion, and are beginning to bypass Huffy headed north along the littoral plain.

By all accounts a major offensive has penetrated your left front and is pouring unchecked into your rear. As the MEB commander, what will you do?

## REQUIREMENT

Develop a MEB plan that includes a general concept of operations (with intent) and broad missions for your GCE, ACE, and combat service support elements as appropriate. (Leave it to your staff to work out the details.) Then provide a brief explanation of your plan.




For discussion, see pp. 84-87.
Game appeared in the *Marine Corps Gazette*, Aug90; solutions, Oct90.

# Discussions

Normally, there is no ideal solution to military problems; every course has its advantages and disadvantages. One must select that which seems best from the most varied aspects and then pursue it resolutely and accept the consequences. Any compromise is bad.

**—Field Marshal Erwin Rommel**

# Ambush at Dusk

*"It is even better to act quickly and err than to hesitate until the time of action is past."*

*—Carl von Clausewitz*

*"Catch the enemy by the nose with fire and kick him in the pants with fire emplaced through movement."*

*—Gen George S. Patton*

**Initiative and Speed**

The first scenario is pretty straightforward—which by no means makes it easy. The platoon is caught in an ambush. Our squad is the only element of the platoon that is not pinned down, but we have no communications with the platoon commander (who has been hit) or the platoon sergeant. We have basically two options: We can (1) wait for instructions, which includes trying to reestablish communications with the platoon headquarters and asking what to do, or (2) act on our own initiative.

While there may be no approved solution to any tactical problem, some problems demand to be solved, and fast. That's the case with "Ambush at Dusk." It's not a debatable point whether we (as the squad leader) should act or not. We *must* act, and we must act *immediately*. We cannot delay action because of a single casualty. In a situation like this in which Marines are under fire, seconds count, and if we do not act promptly there will certainly be more casualties. Thus we introduce the essential element of speed as a fundamental of tactics—timeliness of decision, tempo of operations, and velocity of movement. We'll see it time and time again in the following scenarios.

Everyone who responded to "Ambush at Dusk" when it appeared in the *MCG* agreed on the need for prompt action. We must not wait for instructions to reach us from the platoon headquarters, and it is certainly not advisable to go back into the killing zone—to surrender the only freedom of action the platoon has—to ask for instructions. This is a clear-cut example of a case in which a leader must act without instructions from above. The platoon commander, platoon sergeant, and the rest of the platoon trapped in the killing zone have every right to expect the squad leader to take decisive action.

So, looking at the bigger picture, we ask ourself:

(1) "What can I do to help the platoon as quickly as possible?"
(2) "What can I do to further the accomplishment of the platoon mission?"
(3) Can we do both at once?

**A Sample FragO**

The following is provided not as the "right" answer but as an example of a fragmentary order for one possible solution:

> Fire team leaders, we're going to move on the double to that finger [pointing to the west] and attack the village by fire from the north in order to relieve the platoon and kill the enemy. Guns, you lay down a base of fire from here until we get to the finger. Then, we'll lay down a base of fire while you doubletime up to join us. Smitty [the wounded Marines' fire team leader], leave one man with the casualty until the medevac bird gets here. Get your fire teams and follow me; I'll explain the rest on the move.
>
> [While moving:] "Once we get to the rise and open fire, one of two things will happen. Either the platoon will be able to move, and we'll be the base of fire for their attack, or we'll have to make the attack ourselves with our machinegun team providing the base of fire and the squad enveloping right and swinging in from the north. A green-star cluster will shift the base of fire [as per the platoon's standing operating procedure]."

**❝ The idea behind the *cheng/ch'i* or fix-and-flank is to prevent our enemy from reacting effectively to us by fixing his attention in one direction. ❞**

Importantly, the squad leader has realized the gravity of the situation and decided that an immediate, simple, and decisive response is the only answer. In order to save time, he's even gone so far as to issue part of his order on the move.

**Saving the Platoon**

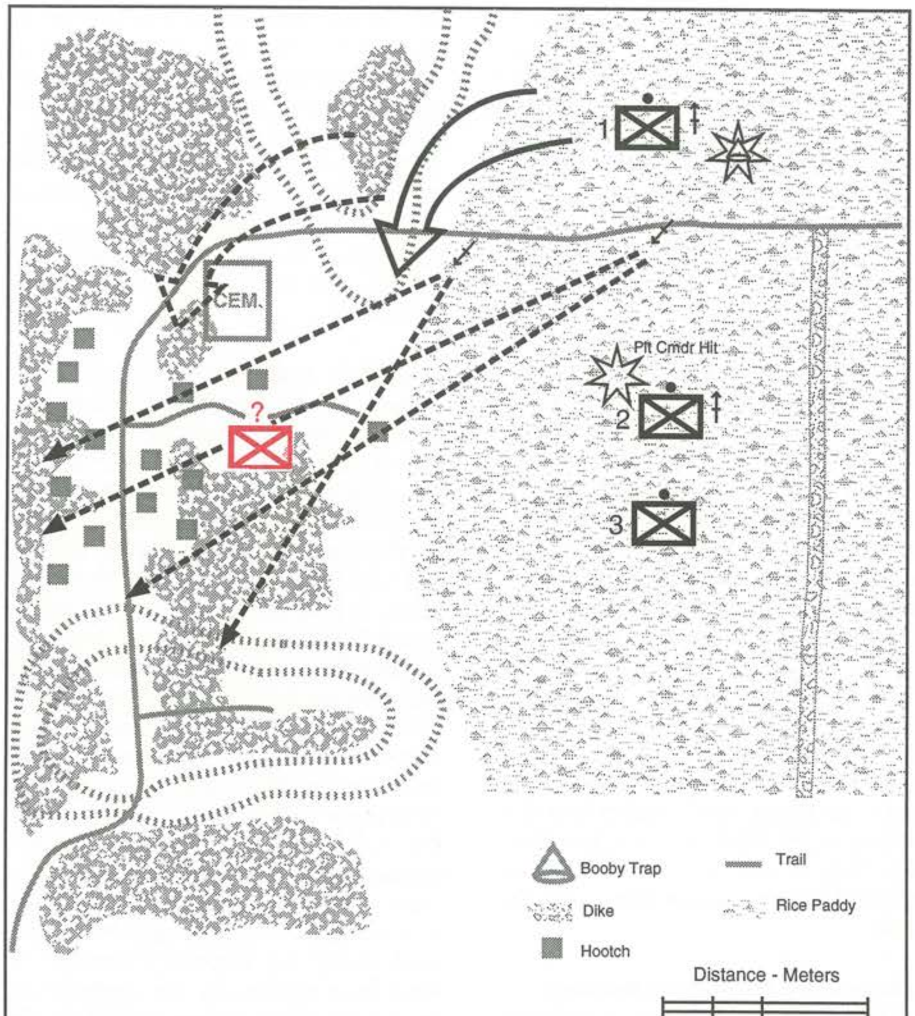
The immediate problem is trying to save the platoon. How can we best do this? Several readers suggested sending all or part of the squad back into the killing zone to help evacuate wounded and increase the platoon's firepower. While it's understandable to want to go directly to the aid of our comrades, in this case it's not a wise idea. First, if it were possible to evacuate wounded from the paddy, there are still plenty of able-bodied Marines nearby to do it. Second, our squad is the only element of the platoon that has freedom of action. It's the only means, short of generating fire superiority from paddy, by which the platoon can seize the initiative back from the enemy. *The key is not to surrender freedom of action by getting pinned down with the rest of the platoon.*

Most readers recognized that the best way we can help the situation is by relieving the pressure on the platoon—i.e., by striking at the enemy force that has the platoon pinned down. The finger to the west offers a certain amount of cover if our squad moves west and also provides a position from which the squad can effectively engage the village from the north. By putting effective suppressing

fire on the village, we take pressure off the platoon—maybe to the point where the platoon regains its freedom of movement and can get out of the rice paddy or can even go into the attack.

**Accomplishing the Mission**

Some *MCG* readers suggested we should be happy with preserving the platoon and should not try to engage the enemy any more than was necessary to allow the platoon to disengage. On the contrary, I suggest that although the platoon's predicament is our first concern, it should not be our only concern. We should also be thinking about ways to force the enemy into a decisive engagement. As Maj Steven A. Hummer wrote in his solution to this problem, "Our mission is to locate and destroy the enemy and now is our opportunity." The fact is that the two objectives are not mutually exclusive; we can attempt to accomplish both at once. It is generally difficult to get a guerrilla enemy to stand and fight. Here we have located a fairly significant enemy force and have a chance to destroy it. Although the platoon's situation is not good and the enemy clearly has the initiative, with timely and aggressive action we can turn the tables. In order to do that we need to launch a rapid and aggressive attack. If we generate fire superiority but do not attack, the enemy will likely withdraw. Likewise, the enemy will likely withdraw after dark, when the effectiveness of his fires has decreased. Either way, we have lost contact. Not good.




**Discussion #1**

**Complementary Forces: the Cheng and Ch'i**

Not only does this problem demand offensive action, but the situation offers a tailor-made opportunity for attack. We don't have to think in terms of making the attack all by ourselves. The platoon returning fire from the rice paddy is a ready-made base of fire for a squad envelopment from the north. Similarly, by taking the enemy under fire from the north, we may relieve pressure on the platoon enough for the platoon to go into the attack.

This situation provides an excellent example of a concept of such basic importance in tactics that we can call it a tactical fundamental: the use of complementary forces, sometimes variously called the cheng and ch'i or fix-and-flank. We'll see the concept time and again in infinite variations, from the simple base of fire and enveloping attack in this scenario to the complementary employment of the ground and aviation combat elements of a Marine expeditionary brigade in Scenario #15. The ancient Chinese warrior-philosopher Sun Tzu wrote that victory:

> . . . is due to operations of the *ch'i* [extraordinary] and the *cheng* [normal] forces. . . . Generally, in battle, use the normal force to engage; use the extraordinary to win. . . . In battle there are only the normal and extraordinary forces, but their combinations are limitless . . . For these two forces are mutually reproductive; their interaction as endless as that of interlocked rings.

Marine BGen Samuel B. Griffith, Sun Tzu's translator, explains:

> The concept expressed *cheng*, "normal" (or "direct") and *ch'i*, "extraordinary" (or indirect") is of basic importance. The normal (*cheng*) force fixes or distracts the enemy; the extraordinary (*ch'i*) forces act when and where their blows are not anticipated. Should the enemy perceive and respond to a *ch'i* maneuver in such a manner is to neutralize it, the maneuver would automatically become *cheng*.

More recently, the famed British military historian and theorist B. H. Liddell Hart wrote that:

> In war the power to use two fists is an inestimable asset. To feint with one fist and strike with the other yields an advantage, but still greater advantage lies in being able to interchange them—to convert the feint into the real blow as the opponent uncovers himself.

And in the quote at the very beginning of this discussion, Gen George Patton expresses the same thought in his own particularly eloquent way.

The idea behind the *cheng/ch'i* or fix-and-flank is to prevent our enemy from reacting effectively to us by fixing his attention in one direction

while we strike from another. In other words, we eliminate his freedom of action. Without our *cheng* to occupy or hinder his efforts, the enemy can shift to meet our *ch'i* with his full strength. But by using complementary forces we force our enemy to disperse his efforts in different directions, while our efforts, although coming from different directions, have a converging effect.

The concept of complementary forces applies to the defense as much as to the offense. In the defense we strive to establish positions that are *mutually supporting*, so that in order for the enemy to attack one he must first expose himself to the fires of another. The concept applies as well to the complementary use of weapons systems, in which context we call it *combined arms*. The complementary use of different weapons systems creates a dilemma for our enemy—in order to avoid the effects of one weapon he must expose himself to another. Within a fire team, for example, we use the squad automatic weapon (SAW) to pin an enemy down, which makes him vulnerable to the M203 grenade launcher. If he tries to move to avoid the effects of the M203, we cut him down with the SAW.

**Coordination and Communications**

Part of our problem in this scenario is that we can't communicate directly with higher headquarters. We do not have direct access to supporting arms or medical evacuation (medevac) for our wounded Marine. How do we coordinate our actions with the platoon and get the support we need?

First, we keep our plan as simple as possible to minimize the amount of coordination necessary. Our decisive course of action should be evident to the rest of the platoon. Given a simple plan, the distances involved and the nature of the terrain, even without direct communications between the squad and the platoon, coordination should not be too difficult. As Capt James R. Sinnott pointed out, any number of simple methods exist to signal the platoon to cease or shift its fires (which should be covered in unit standing operating procedures)—e.g., hand-thrown smoke grenades, pop-up pyrotechnics, or even M203 smoke rounds. As for supporting arms and the medevac, we have to count on the platoon to take care of those.

**Immediate Action Drills**

Perhaps the most important element in coordination in a situation such as this is the mutual understanding and trust that must exist among the different individuals and elements in the platoon. As discussed earlier, this is a situation that calls for immediate action. Appropriately enough, immediate action drills are designed specifically for just such situations. A well-trained platoon will have practiced "plays" for dealing promptly and effectively with likely situations. A typical counterambush drill for a far ambush (such as this) calls for the elements trapped in the killing zone to immediately seek cover and return fire, while elements not in the killing zone immediately maneuver against the enemy, using the trapped elements as their base of fire. As the name indicates, immediate action drills provide an immediate response to crisis situations, saving the critical moments needed to make a decision and issue orders. Equally important, with established immediate action drills everyone in the unit knows what to expect from the other elements, making it easier to coordinate efforts, even without direct communications. Immediate action drills should be practiced to the point that they become second nature for the unit.

As squad leader in this situation we know that the platoon expects us to maneuver against the enemy from the north; we know that the platoon will be supporting us by fire (and will be requesting supporting arms), and will be ready to shift those fires as appropriate.

As Sgt M. R. Hetzler succinctly wrote of this scenario when it appeared in the *MCG*:

> If anything, this problem should show the player the importance of immediate action (IA) drills . . . There is no time to think, only to act when your buddies are under fire. If you're following the prescribed drill, everyone should know what's going on. *Speed*, *simplicity*, and *aggressiveness* are the keys to IA drills, and this situation clearly shows how they can be used to react to a situation and save the lives of your men while destroying the enemy.

If the platoon commander has trained his Marines properly, "Ambush at Dusk" will not pose a problem for our squad leader for he will know just what to do and just what to expect from the platoon.

**Historical Note**

This scenario was based on an actual situation faced by 1st Platoon, Company D, 1st Battalion, 9th Marines near Da Nang in the summer of 1966, as described in Francis J. West's "Mines and Men," *Small Unit Actions in Vietnam: Summer 1966*. The booby trap was intented to halt a Marine patrol in the open—which it did. The Viet Cong ambush was actually designed specifically to get the key members of the patrol. The enemy did not open fire as soon as the booby trap went off, but waited until the platoon commander, platoon sergeant, and corpsman came forward to investigate—as they invariably did. Fortunately, the enemy snipers missed their marks, but the various elements of the patrol were separated and unable to communicate. Squad and fire team leaders had to act on their own initiative, and through aggressive action were able to mount a hasty attack and overcome the resistance. The Viet Cong fled from the village. USMC

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# Platoon Ambush

*"In all operations a moment arrives when brave decisions have to be made if an enterprise is to be carried through."*
*—Adm Sir Roger Keyes*

*"He wins who fires first and can deliver the heaviest fire."*
*—Erwin Rommel*

**Seeing the "Bigger Picture"**

"Platoon Ambush" is a tough problem. As with "Ambush at Dusk," this scenario places a squad leader in a situation in which, on his own initiative, he must make decisions and take actions that impact at a higher level. The platoon faces a dilemma: a presumably favorable occurrence in the approach of the convoy as expected and a very threatening occurrence in the unanticipated appearance of the enemy patrol. Our hypothetical squad leader is the most senior member of the platoon who sees the dilemma. Unfortunately, due to technical problems, his landline communications with the platoon commander aren't working. He is thrust into the position of having to make decisions at the platoon level. A lot of the responsibility for the success or survival of the platoon in the next few minutes will rest on his shoulders.

In order to act properly in this situation, we (as the squad leader) must think not just at the squad level, but at the platoon level. We must look at the "bigger picture" and consider the effects of our decisions on the larger outcome.

This concept applies at all levels and is important enough that we can call it a tactical fundamental. Our understanding of the "bigger picture" should provide a frame of reference for all our decisions. Furthermore, as a general rule, we should think at least "two levels up" and not just one. In other words, a platoon commander would consider the battalion situation in making his decisions. Likewise, a squad leader would normally consider the company situation. (In this particular case the platoon is acting independently.) In making his tactical decisions the commander at any level asks himself, "What can I do at my level to help the higher situation or further the accomplishment of the higher mission?"

In this scenario the platoon commander's orders did not specifically cover what to do in the event of an enemy force coming in from behind the platoon; the platoon commander anticipated forces coming down the road from Depot but not through the woods. We could argue that dealing with any unexpected enemy movement from the east falls under our squad's general mission of flank security. But even if this were not the case—if dealing with the enemy patrol were clearly not part of our squad's assigned mission—we should realize we must act anyway for a couple of reasons. First, this enemy development was not anticipated by the platoon commander's order and therefore is not covered by the plan. Second, it poses a significant threat to the safety of the platoon and the accomplishment of the platoon's mission. Therefore, we have to do something about it.

**Critical Vulnerability—Ours**

Another way to look at this is in terms of critical vulnerability—in this case not the enemy's vulnerability, but our own. In this situation, are we critically vulnerable? Definitely. There is the potential for real trouble here. Of the two enemy forces—the convoy or the patrol—which is more likely to threaten us critically? Clearly, the patrol for it is moving toward the platoon's flank or rear and is in a position possibly to destroy the platoon or cut it off from its route of escape.

**A New Situation Can Make Orders Obsolete**

The one thing the platoon commander's orders were explicit about is that we were not to open fire until the ambush had been sprung. But those instructions clearly were based on conditions and assumptions that no longer exist and are no longer appropriate given the new developments in the sit-

uation; we shouldn't feel restrained by them. Instead, we have to use our best judgment to take whatever initiative will best support the platoon given the new situation.

### "What's the Enemy Up To?"

In any tactical situation we should ask ourselves, "What exactly is the enemy up to?" We can't ignore the possibility that the enemy is aware of the platoon's presence, in which case the patrol is coming after us with a purpose. But even if they're not aware of our ambush and are merely a security patrol, things don't look good for the ambush. Thinking themselves safe in their own rear area, the patrol may very likely follow the animal trail that we crossed, and although we don't know exactly where the trail leads, it appears to lead into the rear of the platoon. Not good. If the patrol doesn't follow the trail but heads due west it will likely strike the objective rallying point (ORP), which probably contains the platoon sergeant and at most one fire team for security. Also not good. If it's a security patrol, protecting the enemy's rear area, it will likely check out the bridge on its route and will likely run directly into the flank of the ambush force on the way. Again, not good. In short, it seems extremely unlikely that the patrol will pass through the area without coming upon some part of our platoon. And even if the patrol does not discover our presence beforehand, it will be in a position to strike our platoon once the ambush is sprung—a vulnerable time.

Complicating things is the approach of the convoy, which will likely—but not definitely—arrive before the enemy patrol does. (A lot depends on the relative speeds of the convoy and patrol.) If we do nothing, the platoon will ambush the convoy as planned, thus giving itself away to the enemy patrol. Conversely, if we strike the patrol, we may give ourselves away to the convoy. The convoy is bigger than usual—eight vehicles already with more coming into view. A lucrative target, certainly—but how much is too much for a platoon ambush to bite off? When planning an ambush, it's not a bad idea to have decided in advance how big a target is too big. If the target is bigger than you can handle, you let it go. Although the convoy is not a combat unit, it is led by a couple of machinegun vehicles and presumably includes other weapons, and can definitely do some damage, especially in conjunction with an attack by the patrol from another direction.

### So What Do We Do?

Having considered all this, what are our options?

• *Option 1: Ignore patrol, continue original mission.* Doing nothing is always an option, right? In this case, definitely not. There is a definite problem here that needs to be dealt with. We cannot ignore the patrol. It clearly poses too great a threat to the platoon and the accomplishment of the mission. At the absolute minimum, we have to warn the platoon commander of the new development.

• *Option 2: Report to platoon, ask for instructions.* Assuming that we can't get the landline working, we can send a runner back to the platoon; he could probably beat the convoy to the ambush site. You might argue that the decision of what to do in this case is not the squad leader's to make. Instead, you might argue, we should inform the platoon commander of the unforeseen situation, but leave it up to him what to do. Unfortunately, there isn't time for that. By the time the platoon commander were to get the information by runner, make his decision, and send instructions back to our squad by runner, it will almost certainly be too late. Furthermore, I suggest that the platoon commander isn't even the best person to make the decision. His entire knowledge of the situation is based on the sketchy and hurried information he will have gotten from the messenger. He understands none of the subtleties of the situation, such as the relative positions of the two enemy forces, their relative speeds, or the degree of threat each actually poses. We can't possibly communicate effectively to him all the intuitive factors that went into our estimate of the situation based on first-hand observation. The bottom line is that the squad leader (who, remember, is thinking like a platoon commander) understands the situation better than anyone else.

> **"In making his tactical decisions the commander at any level asks himself, 'What can I do at my level to help the higher situation or further the accomplishment of the higher mission?'"**

Consequently, we reach the conclusion that we must deal with the enemy patrol. It poses too much of a threat to the platoon and the accomplishment of the mission.

• *Option 3: Deploy against patrol, but don't strike immediately.* You might argue that another option is to be prepared to strike the patrol but to wait as along as possible before initiating action so to give the platoon commander more time to decide what he wants to do. You might argue that by holding off on striking the enemy we leave open to the platoon commander the choice of surprising the convoy or letting it pass through the killing zone, but that once our firefight begins in the woods, the convoy will be tipped off that something's up. You might also argue that by waiting we give the platoon commander time to deploy against the patrol, if he so chooses. However, in this situation I think waiting is a mistake. The longer we wait, the closer we allow both enemy forces to converge on us and the more likely it becomes that we will have to deal with both at once—the worst possible scenario. And the longer we wait as the patrol moves west, the greater risk we run of the platoon being cut off from the ORP. Once the enemy patrol gains the nearby ridge which runs southwest between our squad and the ORP, the platoon is in trouble. The patrol is just about to become a major threat to the platoon, and we can't afford to wait. We must deal with this situation at once.

• *Option 4: Strike the patrol, let the platoon worry about the convoy.* Our fourth option is thus to strike the enemy patrol, by attack or ambush (sending information to that effect to the platoon commander). We can leave it up to the platoon commander whether he thinks the platoon is able to fight both the patrol and convoy at once. (I think it is highly risky.) Of all the elements in the platoon, our squad is the one best disposed to deal with the patrol; in fact, it is the only element in a position to deal with the patrol advantageously. The rest of the platoon, meanwhile, is already deployed to deal with the convoy. If we choose this option, we have to realize that by beginning an engagement with the patrol in the woods, we may sacrifice the element of surprise with regard to the convoy, and we are no longer in a position to protect the ambush site against reinforcements by road from the direction of Depot.

• *Option 5: Strike the patrol, abort the ambush.* We might reach the conclu-

sion, based on our knowledge of the situation, that it is too ambitious and risky for the platoon to try to spring the original ambush while also striking the patrol. So we can send the messenger to the platoon commander with the recommendation of foregoing the convoy and going after the patrol instead. Thus the patrol becomes the new target. Being a platoon-level decision, this certainly would be a gutsy decision for a squad leader to make, but a better one than Option 4, because it leaves less to chance. So what do we do about the convoy approaching down the road? That's a close judgment call that depends on time-distance factors. If the convoy is moving fast enough to get through the killing zone before we'll strike the patrol (but assuming that our messenger will arrive in time to warn the platoon commander not to spring the ambush), we might just let the convoy pass through. That way we have one less problem to worry about. (The platoon can blow the bridge to prevent the machinegun jeeps from coming back.) But if that's not the case—if it appears that the patrol will make contact first or the convoy and patrol will converge on the ambush site about the same time—we might think about quickly dropping a few mortar rounds on the road in order to disrupt and delay the approaching convoy. We should have already laid the mortar on the road and should be able to fire immediately while the rest of the squad deploys against the patrol. A few explosions on the road some distance away will not necessarily alert the patrol to the possibility of the direct threat to itself. We should probably plan to withdraw the mortar at some point to the relative safety of the platoon position.

• *Option 6: Ambush the convoy, fix the patrol.* There is another way besides striking directly at the patrol to prevent it from threatening the platoon. That is by, instead of our going after the patrol, getting the patrol to come to us. We can ambush the convoy ourselves, before it can converge with the patrol and become a real problem, using primarily our mortar, AT4s, and M203s. This is another gutsy call by the squad leader because it is in direct violation of the platoon commander's explicit instructions. An enemy security patrol would be compelled to turn north to investigate. But they would not know that we're already aware of their presence and are waiting for them. After ambushing the convoy (making sure that we get the machinegun jeeps), we quickly shift to face the patrol. Our object is not necessarily to destroy it, but rather to keep it fixed on us while the platoon (which the patrol presumably is not aware of) strikes it from the west—another example of fix-and-flank. Like the others, this option is not without risk. If we fail to smash the head of the convoy, we could be between a rock and a hard place.

**Observations**

For such a simple problem there are a lot of difficult factors for our hypothetical squad leader to consider. Unlike "Ambush at Dusk," in which one general course of action presented itself, this problem has several drastically different solutions, any of which might work. You might argue that any commander would be hard-pressed in the time available to consciously consider all the factors we've discussed. And you'd be right. There simply isn't enough time to deliberate on all the various factors and considerations that weigh on the squad leader's decision. That's exactly the point of doing problems like this one. Through practice we develop the ability to deal with such considerations instinctively and instantly rather than through reasoned deliberation. We internalize the process, so that it occurs automatically and smoothly without our even being aware of it taking place.

What's the bottom line in "Platoon Ambush"? That the squad leader must continuously think beyond his own level and be prepared to act on his own initiative in the best interests of the larger mission—even if it means making decisions usually reserved for the platoon commander. As long as you realized that you have to do something about the enemy patrol which threatens to hit our platoon in the flank, you're on the right track.

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# Attack on Narrow Pass

*"Undeniably, in a mountainous area a small post in a favorable position acquires exceptional strength."*
*—Carl von Clausewitz*

*"Battles are won by fire and movement. The purpose of the movement is to get the fire in a more advantageous place to place on the enemy. This is from the rear or flank."*
*—Gen George S. Patton*

**Thinking Two Levels Up—Again**

This scenario generated a lot of controversy when it first appeared in the *MCG* in March 1991. Although we discussed the importance of thinking at least "two levels up" in the previous two scenarios, it's a point of such significance that it's worth making again. The basic problem in "Attack on Narrow Pass" is how the platoon commander can best further the accomplishment of the battalion's mission. Some readers felt very strongly that the best way the platoon commander could support the battalion was to guard its flank—as explicitly ordered—and nothing more. Others completely ignored the flank guard mission and moved off to strike the enemy in the flank, either at the bridge or at the pass, to take pressure off the battalion.

This scenario exhibits other similarities to the previous ones. As in "Platoon Ambush," while separated from the main body with the mission of protecting its flank, we discover a threat to the main body, but not from our area of responsibility. As in "Ambush at Dusk," the main body is heavily engaged, while our unit enjoys freedom of action and is potentially in a position to directly help the main body. If nothing else, this illustrates the point that while different situations may exhibit similarities, no two situations are the same. We must solve each problem on its own merits, not according to the way we solved a similar problem. Our solution to "Ambush at Dusk," for example, may not be appropriate in the "Attack on Narrow Pass."

**What's the Enemy Up To?**

As always, we should try to get a handle on the enemy's intentions. We know that the enemy has a fairly strong position at Narrow Pass, but this doesn't necessarily mean a large force. As Clausewitz' quote indicates, the proper use of difficult terrain can confer exceptional combat power to even a relatively small force. The enemy has seen fit to place an outpost south of the dry gully to add depth to his defense. The fact that the enemy is able to use his heavy machineguns to fire over the heads of his outpost at night indicates that this is no hasty position, but has been carefully prepared. Without question, this will be one tough nut to crack. In fact, if we're going to take Narrow Pass, the way to do it is not frontally but from the flanks, attacking along the spine of the high ground to negate the strength of the enemy positions.

What about Western Narrow Pass? The patrol we ran into fled in that direction. The enemy almost certainly has forces positioned there. The question is how many? Our platoon has already reached the east-west road and the only enemy we have met are the listening post (LP) we chased off. My guess is that Western Narrow Pass is not as heavily defended—although we don't know for certain.

What about the ridgeline between the passes? Our vehicles may not be able to cross, but as Napoleon said, our infantry can go anywhere two men can set foot. To this point our platoon has seen no sign of enemy forces along the ridge, but again we simply don't know for sure. There are possibilities here worth exploring.

And what about the enemy's tanks, which we haven't heard from yet? If I were the enemy in this situation I would prefer to hold my tanks in reserve north of the ridge on the Western Narrow Pass road midway between the two passes. As the enemy approached one pass or the other my concept would be to drive south through the

other pass and strike the enemy flank via the east-west road south of the ridge.

### What Are Our Options?

So where does this leave us?

• *Option 1: Guard the flank, let the battalion commander worry about the battalion.* As LtCol S. A. Clay wrote:

> The great temptation in this situation is to display excessive initiative at the expense of carrying out very clear-cut, specific orders. . . . The battalion commander instructed the platoon leader to guard the battalion's left flank. There was nothing iffy, conditional, or provisional about the mission: "Guard the left flank." The battalion commander clearly has the right to expect that his left flank will be screened and protected; at the very least, he will be alerted if a significant threat emerges from the west along the road, the rocky gully, or any of the adjacent terrain.

Unlike "Ambush at Dusk" or "Platoon Ambush," you might argue that in this situation the main body is not in obviously dire straits; the battalion is heavily engaged, true, but who's to say it won't fight its way through without our help? Moreover, in this situation we do have communications with higher headquarters. As a result, do we have less of an excuse for acting on our own initiative? Given the apparently unimaginative tactics of the battalion, you might infer that our battalion commander will probably not be too tolerant of subordinates who demonstrate too much independence. Because we're concerned about battalion's success, at a minimum we may offer to direct supporting arms against the enemy machinegun positions. (We might even go so far as to direct one of our machineguns at the western enemy gun position, betraying our own presence in the process.)

• *Option 2: Attack the enemy near Narrow Bridge.* As with going directly to the platoon's aid in "Ambush at Dusk," supporting battalion by this option is not a good idea. As Maj Dirk J. Vangeison wrote, "It would be foolhardy to rush directly to the aid of the battalion under confusing circumstances, darkness, and with such a small force." This is especially true since battalion seems to be conducting an attack around the enemy's east flank—i.e., toward us. Attacking east, we would put ourselves directly in the line of friendly fires. Moreover, this option would put us under the fire of the same machineguns that are engaging the battalion. As we've said before, this would mean surrendering freedom of action. If we're intent on helping battalion out of its predicament, there are more far-reaching ways to do it. For example:

• *Option 3: Launch a flank attack against the enemy holding the pass.* You might argue that, looking at the bigger picture, we know we must do everything we can to facilitate battalion's getting through Narrow Pass, and that the best way to do this is to attack the enemy holding the pass in the flank. You might argue convincingly that the actual problem to the battalion's front makes a possible threat to the flank of less immediate concern. (I would argue, however, that an enemy counterattack with tanks east via Western Narrow Pass is a likely enemy response and cannot simply be ignored.) In opposition you might argue that our platoon is not a big enough force to overtake an enemy force that has managed to stop the battalion. But the American military historian S.L.A. Marshall wrote:

> **"Simply put, the idea . . . is to avoid enemy surfaces and exploit enemy gaps. . . . we try to avoid the enemy where and when he is strong and strike him where and when he is weak or vulnerable."**

> For the infantry soldier the great lesson of minor tactics in our time . . . is the overpowering effect of relatively small amounts of fire when delivered from the right ground at the right hour. . . . [T]he salient characteristic of most of our great victories (and a few of our defeats) was that they pivoted on the fire action of a few men.

As we've already discussed, if anybody is going to take Narrow Pass, it's probably going to be from the flank as opposed to frontally.

• *Option 4: Protect flank while also developing other options.* Perhaps you've reached the conclusion that you can't ignore your orders to guard the flank—that, in fact, an enemy counterattack from the west is a distinct possibility. But at the same time you realize that battalion isn't going to get through Narrow Pass using its current approach. Perhaps you know that your battalion commander is going to start considering other routes across Sanctuary Ridge and expects his subordinates to use initiative to develop opportunities. So you might establish a blocking position, with your Dragons and machineguns and most of the platoon, on the spur east of Western Narrow Pass and at the same time send a patrol up the spur to the crest of the ridge to ascertain enemy dispositions. We don't know if the ridge or Western Narrow Pass will offer a way for battalion to get into Sanctuary Plain; the only thing we know for certain is that Narrow Pass won't. From a central position on the ridge, we are in a good position to flank either of the passes, or move against the enemy machinegun positions from the rear. If we push out west along the ridge, we are also in a position to continue to protect the battalion's left flank by closing down Western Narrow Pass.

### What About Battalion?

Unlike the previous scenarios, in this situation our commander does have communication with higher headquarters. No matter what decision the platoon commander makes, it's important that he contact battalion to report the situation as he sees it from his vantage point and to suggest any possible options for battalion.

It's perhaps a little unfair to put a platoon commander in the position of having to make all these decisions about how the battalion ought to act—although it could happen. Hopefully, our platoon commander is not the only person thinking at the battalion level; hopefully the battalion commander has got a few ideas himself. Hopefully, our platoon commander is not the only person in the battalion who realizes that we probably ought to at least start looking at some other options for getting across Sanctuary Ridge. That decision ought to belong to the battalion commander, and this scenario could just as easily have been designed as a battalion problem. If our battalion commander is intent on forcing his way frontally through Narrow Pass no matter what, there may be nothing our platoon can do to prevent disaster. But the battalion commander certainly ought to be considering other plans and ought to be open to suggestions from his subordinates. The question is: What will it take for the battalion commander to shift his axis of advance away from the Narrow Pass?

### Surfaces and Gaps

This brings us to another fairly simple but extremely important concept: surfaces and gaps. This is not a new concept; it has been around for ages in various guises. Says Col Michael D. Wyly, one of our leading tactical thinkers:

> It is unimportant whether you refer to this concept as surfaces and gaps or soft-spot tactics or simply the idea of pitting your strength against the enemy's weakness, call it what you will.

The great Sun Tzu used an analogy from nature:

> Now any army may be likened to water, for just as flowing water avoids the height and hastens to the lowlands, so an army avoids strength and strikes weakness. And as water shapes its flow in accordance with the ground, so an army manages its victory in accordance with the situation of the enemy. And as water has no constant form, there are in war no constant conditions. Thus, one able to gain the victory by modifying his tactics in accordance with the enemy situation may be said to be divine.

Taking his cue from Sun Tzu, Liddell Hart developed the "expanding torrent" theory:

> If we watch a torrent bearing down on each successive bank of earth and dam in its path, we see that it first beats against the obstacle feeling it and testing it at all points. Eventually it finds a small crack at some point. Through this crack pour the first driplets of water and rush straight on. The pent up water on each side is drawn towards the breach. It swirls through and around the flanks of the breach, wearing away the earth on each side and so widening the gap. Simultaneously the water behind pours straight through the breach . . .

Simply put, the idea captured in these quotes is to avoid enemy surfaces and exploit enemy gaps. Or in other words, we try to avoid the enemy where and when he is strong and strike him where and when he is weak or vulnerable. Gaps may be actual physical gaps in the enemy's dispositions, or they may be any exploitable weakness—spacial, technological, moral, etc. Likewise, a surface may be an actual strongpoint, or it may be any enemy capability. In our scenario, Narrow Pass clearly is a surface. There may be gaps elsewhere—we won't know until we take action to find out.

In the words of *FMFM 1, Warfighting*:

> Due to the fluid nature of war, gaps will rarely be permanent and will usually be fleeting. To exploit them demands flexibility and speed. We must actively seek our gaps by continuous and aggressive reconnaissance.

In Option 4, our platoon commander is actively seeking out gaps, as *FMFM 1* instructs, by sending a patrol north to the ridge. We know that the enemy is aware of our platoon's presence because we chased off one of his LPs. If the ridgeline or Western Narrow Pass isn't defended in strength, we can bet that the enemy is sending reinforcements in a hurry. If we don't act quickly we are going to find that our possible gap has turned into a surface. *FMFM 1* continues:

> Once we locate [gaps], we must exploit them by funneling our forces through rapidly. For example, if our focus of effort has struck a surface but another unit has located a gap, we shift the focus of effort to the second unit and redirect our combat power in support of it. In this manner we "pull" combat power through gaps from the front rather than "pushing" it through from the rear.

I suggest that in our battalion, the platoon commander should know that the battalion commander expects him to actively probe for gaps routinely and that the battalion commander, realizing he has struck a surface in this situation, should be ready to redirect his companies behind our platoon. As for the original flank guard mission, our battalion commander, realizing that our platoon is in the best position to find a gap, should consider assigning another unit to protect the flank and should cut our platoon commander loose to develop the situation.

### The Bottom Line

One main reason this scenario caused such disagreement among readers is that the situation was so uncertain and allowed for widely differing assumptions and interpretations. One of the main points of this book is the importance of decisiveness in the face of incomplete information. However, a certain amount of information is essential to making a sound decision. Indecisiveness leads to disaster, but going off half-baked can be just as disastrous. There is a lot more about this situation that we ought to know before we commit ourselves. What is the situation at Western Narrow Pass? Does the enemy hold the ridge in strength? What is the actual threat to the left flank? A good commander has to know when he has enough information to make an informed decision and when he needs to develop the situation to gain more information. More about this later . . .

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# Attack on Narrow Pass, Continued—From Bad To Worse

*"Gallant fellows, these soldiers; they always go for the thickest place in the fence."*

*—Adm Sir John de Robeck*

*"Do not renew an attack along the same line (or in the same form) after it has once failed. A mere reinforcement of weight is not sufficient change, for it is probable that the enemy will have strengthened himself in the process."*

*—B. H. Liddell Hart*

**What's Different?**

Based on the controversial, strongly divided response to "Attack on Narrow Pass" when it appeared in the *MCG*, this follow-on scenario was developed in order to see what sort of developments in the situation it would take to get the hardline "flank guarders" to change their minds.

What has changed from Scenario #3 to Scenario #4 that might (or might not) lead us to change our plan? In the former scenario, battalion had made contact with a sizable enemy force—had hit a surface—but was not necessarily in dire straits. Meanwhile, it seemed that the situation in our area *might* offer some opportunities (in the form of gaps), although we didn't yet know for certain. In the latter, it's becoming increasingly clear (to us at least) that battalion is going for the "thickest place in the fence"—as Adm de Robeck had observed of the British forces making repeated fruitless frontal assaults against strong Turkish positions at Gallipoli in 1915. Meanwhile, we have reconnoitered Sanctuary Ridge to our north and have made contact with nothing more than an enemy listening post (LP). Additionally, we spot some motorized/mechanized activity north of the ridge. In short, the situation has become much clearer on both fronts. Battalion has hit a hard spot and is in trouble while opposite us the enemy is weak.

**What Do We Do?**

Our options are roughly the same as before, with the exception that "pulling" the battalion across the ridge west of Narrow Pass is probably no longer viable (as we'll discuss).

Even if we decide to interpret our mission narrowly and maintain a blocking position to protect the battalion's left flank, 2dLts Brian J. Donovan and Thomas C. King suggest that we shouldn't do it in the immediate vicinity of Checkpoint 37. The enemy has already located us there twice. An artillery mission has landed a short distance away. We're just lucky he isn't more proficient with his supporting arms. (Or maybe he's too busy firing at the lucrative target our battalion presents and can't spare the fire missions.) The key concept here is obvious; if you can be located, you can be targeted. At a minimum we ought to move. The spur north of Checkpoint 37 looks like a suitable position from which we can control the east-west road. (More on this later.) Of course, if we're willing to move up onto the ridge, why not keep going . . . ?

**What About the Flank Guard Mission?**

At this stage, the way things have developed, I would argue that a possible threat to the battalion's left flank is of less consequence than a very real and significant threat to its front. How much worse can things get? However, I think we have gotten lucky on this count. I think that there is, in fact, a *real* threat to the battalion's flank. It is the group of vehicles assembling (somewhat belatedly, in my opinion) north of the ridge. Again (and always) trying to figure out the enemy's plans, I think the enemy intends to move his mobile forces south via Western Narrow Pass and strike east against the battalion. It's the most logical enemy countermove. So, how have we gotten lucky? From the ridgeline we can protect the battalion by blocking the enemy move (*before* the enemy mobile force reaches Western Narrow Pass) just as effectively as we can from Checkpoint 37. But we have to act *fast*; the enemy appears to be getting ready to move.

**Key Terrain**

This situation leads us to another key thought: the importance of terrain.

Terrain is of primary significance to the tactician; a huge part of tactics, in fact, is based on being able to "read" terrain. But it's essential to point out that terrain is not significant for its own sake. The high ground north of Checkpoint 37 on Sanctuary Ridge is not important simply because it's high ground. *Terrain is important only to the degree that it confers an advantage to whoever controls it.* Terrain is something to be *used*, not simply something to be *gained*.

The high ground to the north—Sanctuary Ridge—*is* key terrain, though. Why? For several reasons. First, by controlling the undefended ridge we hold open a gap through which battalion might pour like an "expanding torrent." Second, being on the ridge puts us in position to make a move against the flank of the enemy positions at either pass. And third, from the ridge we can engage enemy forces moving east-west on *either* side of the ridge. We can thus move our entire platoon to the undefended ridge and be in position to make a move against the enemy positions at Narrow Pass from the flank while still providing protection for the battalion's flank.

We should point out that while the position on the ridge offers far more options, it is not without risks. We risk being cut off if the enemy is able to break through on the east-west road south of the ridge. Moreover, if the battalion decides to break contact and fall back, we're hung out to dry.

**Multiple Options**

This discussion in turn leads us to yet another valuable concept. Liddell Hart suggested that, whenever possible, we should "take a line of operation which offers alternative objectives." Not only do we create more options and opportunities for ourselves, we make it much harder for the enemy to anticipate our next move and to defend against it. As just discussed, the position on Sanctuary Ridge at once offers numerous options, both offensive and defensive. By comparison, a position in the vicinity of Checkpoint 37, only several hundred meters away, limits our courses of action to basically one—establishing a blocking position on the left flank.

**More on Surfaces and Gaps**

To continue our discussion of surfaces and gaps, what was a hunch in the last scenario is more certain now—that Narrow Pass represents a definite enemy strongpoint, while further west along the ridge represents a soft spot. Ideally, by now the battalion should have shifted its axis of advance further west—either through Western Narrow Pass or over the ridge itself—to exploit the opportunity developed by our platoon.

In order for this process to work several conditions must exist. First, units and commanders must have the flexibility to adjust quickly to fleeting opportunities, to act like water "hastening to the lowlands." Second, subordinate leaders must have the initiative to probe for and create opportunities; they must keep their seniors appraised of developments; and they must stay focused on the mission and intent of their higher commanders—in other words, they cannot turn into "loose cannons." They must act with initiative, yes, but always with regard to the larger situation. Third, senior commanders must be receptive to the opportunities developed by their subordinates; moreover, they must encourage their subordinates to act with boldness and initiative to develop the situation and must support them when they do. And finally, seniors must explain their intent clearly so that their subordinates have a sound basis for their actions.

> **" . . . whenever possible, we should take a line of operation which offers alternative objectives. Not only do we create more options and opportunities for ourselves, we make it much harder for the enemy to anticipate our next move. . . . "**

In this situation, I suggest that "pulling" battalion across the ridge is probably no longer an option. Battalion is engaged in close combat and probably cannot effectively disengage and move laterally across the enemy's front at short range. So while finding a gap elsewhere might have been an option earlier, at this stage it seems that the only viable course is to help battalion fight its way through where it is. Lack of adaptability, flexibility, and quickness have constrained us to fighting a pitched battle at Narrow Pass.

**Screen Versus Guard**

There is possibly another way to deal with the dilemma over securing the battalion's flank and helping battalion out of its immediate predicament. That is to change the mission from flank guard to flank screen. Guard and screen are two security missions that differ in the amount of protection they provide. A guard force has a mission to provide physical protection to the main body against the effects of enemy direct fire. A guard fights in the conduct of its mission, using offensive, defensive, or delaying action. A screen, on the other hand, provides the main body with early warning of enemy action but does not provide physical protection. A screen reports information and may direct supporting arms, but fights only in self-preservation.

A third classification of security mission is cover. Covering forces are self-contained tactical units operating independently from the main force for the purpose of intercepting, engaging, delaying, disorganizing, and deceiving the enemy before he can attack the main force. Covering forces generally operate beyond artillery range from the main body (and are thus beyond the scope and scale of this scenario).

In this scenario, an option might be to screen the left flank with a minimal force—maybe a fire team and the Dragons (since this is the likely avenue of approach of enemy tanks)—and use the rest of our force to relieve the pressure on the battalion. As discussed earlier, we can screen just as effectively (or even better) from atop Sanctuary Ridge as from Checkpoint 37.

Of course, the decision to change the platoon's mission from guard to screen rests normally with the higher commander who assigned the mission in the first place, although in a dire situation the platoon commander may very well find himself in the position of having to make that call himself. I introduce the discussion of screen versus guard simply to suggest another possible way to deal with the dilemma we face.

**The Bottom Line**

So, the question is, Has the situation changed enough—has it become desperate enough—for you to abandon your original orders as no longer applicable and to take matters into your own hands? Regardless of how you eventually answer, you're forced to analyze the larger situation, your role in it, and what actions you can and ought to take—and that's the ultimate object of the scenario.

# 'Film at Eleven'

*"Should one ask: 'How do I cope with a well-ordered enemy host about to attack me?' I reply: 'Seize something he cherishes, and he will conform to your desires.' "*

*—Sun Tzu*

*"For to win one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the acme of skill. To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill."*

*—Sun Tzu*

**Acting With Discretion**

Given the relative strengths in this situation, there is little doubt we will seize Oasis one way or the other. The goal is to minimize the cost to all concerned. Obviously, we want to minimize our own casualties. but it's equally important to minimize casualties among the locals. In a response to this scenario when it appeared in the *MCG*, Maj H. Heath Fox II gave this concise analysis:

> A key to this situation, especially since we're seizing the town for occupation by the MCSSD [Mobile Combat Service Support Detachment], is not making more enemies than we already have—particularly ones who are not easily identifiable. Care must be exercised when dealing with a mixed combatant/noncombatant populace. Any imprudence on our part will lead to unnecessary civilian casualties, create further animosities toward us among the civilian population, and is sure to be reported in a negative context by the TV news crew. Minimizing civilian casualties and collateral damage is in our own best interests.

Since the MCSSD is going to be operating out of Oasis, it will simplify the security situation if we gain the cooperation, if not the actual support, of the locals. We should try to spare not only the lives but also the dwellings and crops of the inhabitants.

Our plan should first include the possibility of seizing Oasis without a fight. In fact, we should make every effort to induce the militia to surrender without fighting. Certainly, preparatory fires are out of the question; unprovoked firing, in addition to making for poor publicity, may convince the locals they have no choice but to fight in self-defense. We should fire only after being fired upon. But to prevent Marines from being passive targets, we should have a simple and immediate signal for transitioning from nonfiring to firing mode. We should stipulate who has the authority to give this signal.

**“We should also stipulate general rules of engagement, such as what sort of response to aggression is acceptable and what sort is not. Even after being fired upon, we don't want to return fire indiscriminately.”**

We should also stipulate general rules of engagement, such as what sort of response to aggression is acceptable and what sort is not. Even after being fired upon, we don't want to return fire indiscriminately. Since we have the time, we should make sure this is very clear throughout the unit. The bottom line is that we want to minimize collateral damage, while at the same time minimizing the risk of our Marines.

**Center of Gravity/Critical Vulnerability**

We have already discussed the importance of pitting our strength against the enemy's weakness, of striking where the enemy is vulnerable. But that's only part of the equation. An enemy may be vulnerable in a particular area precisely because that area is unimportant to him and so he hasn't bothered to protect it. In such a case, even though we would be attacking where the enemy is weak, we would gain little for our efforts. We must also commit our strength where and when it will do the most good. In other words, we want to attack the enemy at some critical point or center of gravity. We want to go after the one thing—the unit, capability, place, whatever—that contributes most to the enemy's ability or will to resist, the one thing that if lost will contribute most directly to the enemy's downfall. But we want to make sure to

do it in a way that exploits the enemy's vulnerabilities. There's a definite ruthlessness about attacking critical enemy vulnerabilities, a sense of "going for the jugular." Bruce I. Gudmundsson describes it very clearly in *Tactical Notebook* (Mar93):

> Nature provides a useful example of a critical vulnerability in the form of the jugular vein and carotid arteries. Carrying, as they do, the blood to and from the brain, these vessels are critical to life. Located on the outside of the neck and throat, moreover, they are poorly protected. The knife aimed towards them will run into very little resistance from muscle and none from bone.

What is the center of gravity of Oasis? Some readers suggested the community center. Other readers recognized, however, that the true center of gravity—the one thing the locals cannot live without—is the pump station. Not only is the pump station the literal lifeline of this desert community, but it is probably the symbolic one as well. Seize the pump station and any inclination to continue to resist is gone. Being on the outskirts of the town, the pump station is vulnerable to attack. As SgtMaj P. J. Pollione wrote in response to this scenario:

> The pump station is the prime objective. Since we don't know how the militia will react, control of the water will serve as a catalyst for the enemy to surrender. Attacking from the west and north is the only feasible way to maneuver without destroying the crop fields. Since the locals depend on these fields for food, it becomes important to save them and thus try to win local support.

The community center, a two-story masonry building that provides the best observation and cover in Oasis, is next in order of importance. The community center is probably also the militia headquarters and, like the pump station, a community symbol. Wrote Maj Fox:

> By seizing the pump station, we'll control the only local fresh water supply, and the source of irrigation for the local food supply. The pump station/ water supply . . . is the center of gravity in this situation. By seizing the community center, we'll control the main building, and a key defensible position in the town. Controlling these two key terrain features gives us effective control of Oasis. By executing a vigorous effort to seize the two buildings quickly, I hope to discourage militia resistance against us.

Whatever plan we eventually develop, it should probably call for the early seizure of the pump station and community center as a means for controlling Oasis and its population.

**“We want to go after the one thing—the unit, capability, place, whatever—that contributes most to the enemy's ability or will to resist, the one thing that if lost will contribute most directly to the enemy's downfall.”**

**Preparation**

Of the first five scenarios, this is the first in which time is not a critical factor, the first in which we've actually got time to catch our breath and think about our plan. That in itself is a pretty clear indication of the importance of tempo. As the Duke of Wellington said, "In military operations, time is everything." The previous scenarios required us to conduct *hasty* operations, which relied for success on the enemy's lack of preparedness and on our ability to improvise and act quickly. In this scenario, however, it's to our advantage to conduct a *deliberate* operation. Deliberate operations rely for success on our own level of preparedness. The problem with deliberate operations is that while we are taking the time to prepare, usually so is the enemy. Not so with " 'Film at Eleven,' " a static situation in which we have no reason to think that the enemy's defenses will get any stronger over the next 22 hours. When time is on our side, we should use it. The luxury of a 22-hour window in which to accomplish our mission in this case allows us to pick the optimal time of attack, to consider our options deliberately, to develop a more detailed order reflecting a more coordinated plan, and to conduct a rehearsal. This last point is perhaps most important. When we've got the time, there is usually no better way to spend it than in a rehearsal, which allows us to iron out snags, smooth out coordination, and give our people some idea of what to expect.

Just because we have a certain amount of time to prepare an operation doesn't mean we should take it easy. Time is a commodity shared by both sides, and the object is to make better use of that time than our opponent by getting better prepared. Moreover, once we're into the conduct phase and have made contact with the enemy, speed of action becomes essential again.

**Options**

There are a couple of fundamentally different approaches to solving this problem.

• *Option 1: Surprise night attack.* The object of this option would be to disarm the enemy before he could make any organized resistance. It would probably mean a dismounted attack, since the noise of our vehicles would compromise the element of surprise. However, even moving by foot, it will be difficult to achieve surprise in open desert terrain.

**“When we've got the time, there is usually no better way to spend it than in a rehearsal, which allows us to iron out snags, smooth out coordination, and give our people some idea of what to expect.”**

• *Option 2: Show of force to intimidate.* This option is as much psychological as it is tactical, playing to the locals' natural disinclination for fighting by convincing them it is not a wise thing to do. The aim of this option would be to appear so overwhelming that the locals wouldn't even think of resisting. We would want to appear so powerful that they would realize that resistance was suicidal. In this case, we would probably want to make our move during broad daylight so the townspeople could see us; we would stay on our vehicles, making as much noise and kicking up as much dust as possible. Perhaps having one platoon halt conspicuously outside of Oasis with its weapons leveled at the town, we would drive into Oasis like we owned the place. Putting the camera van right up near the front would help to psychologically disarm the locals, reinforcing the point that we know we have little to fear. The danger with this option is that we have surrendered most tactical advantages for the sake

of psychological effect; if our psychological gambit does not work, we may have a fight on our hands.

*Option 3: Cordon and negotiate.* We could surround Oasis, open communications, and appeal to reason. This way we would give the Oasians a clear opportunity to surrender peacefully and in the process would appear as nonthreatening a possible. The problem with this option is that we would be putting the Oasians in a position to negotiate. A negotiated settlement could be a lengthy process. And if negotiations fail, we have lost any of the tactical or psychological advantages of the previous options.

**What Do We Do Once We Capture Oasis?**

No matter what plan we use, once we seize the town we have to act quickly to consolidate our position. We should meet immediately with the local leadership. We should tell the local leaders that we hold them responsible for the cooperation and good behavior of the citizens. We should make it clear that in return for the citizens' cooperation and good behavior, we will harm nobody, will cause as little disruption to the daily routine as possible, and will provide what medical assistance we can. We should make it known that we have taken over responsibility for the protection of the village, that the local militia is at this moment disbanded, and that the leaders have 30 minutes in which to collect and turn in all weapons.

**Dealing With the News Team**

The problem of dealing with the news team is an interesting one. In this age of electronic media, images and information are powerful weapons, particularly as they affect a nation's resolve. We must use them to our advantage. The presence of the news team in this scenario does not create the need to act with discretion, but it certainly emphasizes it. If there is to be bloodshed at Oasis, we want it to be clear that it is not the result of American misconduct.

**The Bottom Line**

This scenario differs from the previous ones in that restraint and discretion are key considerations. In an age of low-intensity conflict, in which a grayish sort of pseudo-war blurs the distinction between war and peace, questions about restraints on the use of force are extremely important and sometimes extremely difficult.

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# Hole in the Trowzer Pocket

*"Countless minor incidents—the kind you never really foresee—combine to lower the general level of performance, so that one always falls far short of the intended goal."*

*—Carl von Clausewitz*

*"I suppose dozens of operation orders have gone out in my name, but I never, throughout the war, actually wrote one myself. I always had someone who could do that better than I could. One part of the order I did, however, draft myself—the intention. It is usually the shortest of all paragraphs, but it is always the most important, because it states—or it should—just what the commander intends to achieve. It is the one overriding expression of will by which everything in the order and every action by every commander and soldier in the army must be dominated. It should, therefore, be worded by the commander himself."*

*—Field Marshal Sir William Slim*

**Friction**

This scenario was inspired by actual experience. During a field exercise, my force and another were supposed to link up on what we thought would be an easily identifiable piece of terrain. As expected, both forces had no trouble whatsoever locating the linkup point. Each commander was sure of his location. The only problem was that we had each gone to a different terrain feature. Needless to say, the linkup did not go smoothly as planned.

The first lesson of "Hole in the Trowzer Pocket" is thus that things *will* go wrong. People *will* go to the wrong piece of high ground. The seemingly simple things will become difficult. As Murphy said, what can go wrong, will. In addition to the problems posed by the enemy, it is the natural order of things to have to deal with the "countless minor incidents" that Clausewitz went on to call "Friction." Friction is one of the defining features of combat. We will never eliminate it. The first requirement then, before we can hope to accomplish anything else, is to be able to deal with friction.

**Mission Tactics**

We have talked at length about the subordinate's need to "think big" and to act in the best interests of the higher mission. This places a lot of responsibility on the shoulders of subordinates. If we're going to burden people with responsibility (as we should), we must also give them the corresponding authority to act. We can best accomplish this through the use of mission tactics. According to *FMFM 1*:

> Mission tactics are just as the name implies: the tactic of assigning a subordinate a mission without specifying how the mission must be accomplished. We leave the manner of accomplishing the mission to the subordinate, thereby allowing him the freedom—and establishing the duty—to take whatever steps he deems necessary based on the situation. The senior prescribes the method of execution only to the degree that is essential for coordination. It is this freedom for initiative that permits the high tempo of operations that we desire. Uninhibited by restrictions from above, the subordinate can adapt his actions to the changing situation. He informs his commander what he has done, but he does not wait for permission.

What we're talking about here is decentralizing decisionmaking authority. This decentralization allows us to continue to act appropriately and operate effectively in the face of failed communications, as we saw in "Ambush at Dusk" and "Platoon Ambush"; when the situation has drastically changed, as at "Narrow Pass"; or when friction threatens to unravel our best laid plans, as in this scenario. Moreover, decentralization allows us to act *quickly*. (As we saw in "Platoon

Ambush," the squad leader didn't have time to send a runner to the platoon commander with a situation report and wait for the runner to return with instructions. He had to act.)

Contrary to popular belief, this is not a radical, untried concept, but one that has been proved in combat. Slim, who inflicted the greatest defeat on Japanese ground forces of any Allied commander in World War II, described his lessons learned in Burma:

> Commanders at all levels had to act more on their own; they were given greater latitude to work out their own plans to achieve what they knew was the Army commander's intention. In time they developed to a marked degree a flexibility of mind and a firmness of decision that enabled them to act swiftly to take advantage of sudden information or changing circumstances without reference to their superiors. . . . This acting without orders, in anticipation of orders, or without waiting for approval, yet always within the overall intention, must become second nature in any form of warfare where formations do not fight closely *en cadre*, and must go down to the smallest units. It requires in the higher command a corresponding flexibility of mind, confidence in subordinates, and the power to make intentions clear right through the force.

Slim makes it clear that we cannot have decentralized initiative without some means of providing focus to the various efforts. As *FMFM 1* says: "To do so would be to dissipate our strength. We seek unity [of effort], not through imposed control, but through *harmonious* initiative and lateral coordination."

**"... things will go wrong. People will go to the wrong piece of high ground. The seemingly simple things will become difficult."**

It is essential that the senior commander provide his subordinates with the guidance and frame of reference that allow them to exercise initiative more confidently and effectively.

**Commander's Intent**

There are several tools with which the commander can do this. The first, and perhaps most important, as Slim's quotes indicate, is the commander's intent. In assigning a mission to a subordinate we should give both the task to be accomplished and the intent behind the task. The task describes in quantitative terms the *who, what, where,* and *when* of the mission. The intent, on the other hand, describes the *why* behind the mission and, in qualitative terms, the *end result* we expect. Between the task and intent, *FMFM 1* says:

> . . . the intent is predominant. While a situation may change, making the task obsolete, the intent is more permanent and continues to guide our actions. Understanding our commander's intent allows us to exercise initiative in harmony with the commander's desires.

The commander's intent describes his vision of the outcome of the action in terms that relate to the enemy and the battlefield. The intent is not merely a restatement of the mission or the concept of operations. It should not specify how to accomplish the mission ("Bypass enemy resistance; avoid getting bogged down . . . ") or simply specify the intensity of the action ("Attack aggressively . . . ").

In this scenario, for example, our assigned task is to establish a blocking position in the vicinity of Hills 88 and 82 and, commencing at 0300, to engage and destroy enemy forces trying to escape south out of the pocket in our sector. We know that the overall intent of the operation is to encircle and destroy the enemy force holed up in Trowzer. The final result expected out of the blocking position is to prevent the southward escape of the enemy. As the scenario unfolds we have no trouble with fulfilling our assigned task. We establish our blocking position with no problem. Unfortunately, it becomes clear to us that although we have performed our assigned task, our commander's intent is not being satisifed. The enemy is escaping in sizable numbers out of the pocket. (It doesn't matter that it's not our fault. We're not interested in who's to blame; we're interested in accomplishing the mission.) So where does this leave us?

**Options**

• *Option 1: Execute assigned task.* In other words, do nothing for the present. First, the time to engage the enemy as stipulated in the order has not arrived. Second, there is no enemy in our sector (the artillery unit on the road being in Fox Company's sector). We certainly can't be criticized for following orders, right? Wrong. Orders to the contrary do not absolve us from doing the right thing. If we act, we may make a mistake, but not to act is inexcusable. As Winston Churchill said: "Errors toward the enemy must be lightly judged." By now it should be clear that even though we are executing our assigned tasks, our commander's intent requires us to do more. So what's next?

• *Option 2: Engage the artillery unit.* At a minimum we can engage the artillery unit, a valuable target. Purists will argue that the artillery unit is in Fox's sector and that doctrine prohibits us from firing across boundaries. Boundaries are control measures established between adjacent units for the purpose of coordination. They ensure a unit the freedom to operate within its own zone or sector without interference from outside, and they restrict a unit from interfering in another unit's zone or sector. You might argue that instead of violating the boundary we can request that higher headquarters shift it west so that the artillery unit is in our sector. Three problems with this. First, it'll never happen in time to get the artillery unit. Second, since Fox insists it's in the right place, regiment has no reason to shift the boundary; regiment has already told us to work it out between ourselves. And third, the more effective way to deal with such coordination problems is laterally—i.e., directly with the adjacent unit—rather than vertically through the chain of command. So then you might argue (quite correctly) that the more appropriate response is to contact Fox Company directly and request permission to fire across the boundary.

**"The task describes in quantitative terms the *who, what, where*, and *when* of the mission. The intent, on the other hand, describes the *why* behind the mission and, in qualitative terms, the *end result* we expect."**

Since the Fox Company commander is convinced that he's in the right place and that *we're* the ones who are lost, he's not likely to give us permission to start firing indiscriminately into his sector. What do we do when

he denies our request? Just as an assigned task should not prevent us from doing what's required, neither should we let a control measure get in the way of the right tactical decision. Control measures aren't laws. Good tactics take precedence over proper use of control measures. Moreover, I would argue that boundaries are meant to exist between adjacent units, but in this case there is no adjacent unit. Fox isn't there. The boundary is not appropriate to the current tactical situation. "Fine," the purist might say, "if you take it upon yourself to ignore a boundary imposed by higher headquarters, you must be fully responsible for your actions." Quite true; but by now we should be quite used to taking full responsibility for our actions.

• *Option 3: Direct supporting arms west of Hill 81.* I don't mean to imply that we should simply ignore boundaries and fire across them indiscriminately. As already discussed, boundaries exist for good reason. Among other things, they are designed to protect us from friendly fire. In the first place, in this case we would be calling for fire exactly where Fox Company thinks it's located, and the fire support coordination center assigned responsibility for coordinating supporting arms for this operation would certainly disapprove the fire mission. We could fire the mission with our own mortars. Moreover, we could get Fox to give us a bearing to the sound of the impact as a means of trying to determine Fox's location. The problem is that we don't know exactly where Fox is, we're no longer in a position to effectively control the fire mission, and we certainly don't want to risk friendly casualties. This option is less defensible than engaging the artillery on the road by direct fire.

• *Option 4: Attack west toward Hill 81.* The rationale here would be to assume Fox's mission as well as our own in order to prevent the enemy's escape. A bold move certainly; but in the dark, without any preparations, with enemy units moving down the road posing a definite threat to our right flank, without knowing where Fox is, and without the ability to coordinate effectively with Fox as a result, this is a risky proposition. There is a definite potential for several things to go wrong, not least of which is an intramural firefight.

• *Option 5: Shift southwest to Hill 87.* Based on the terrain, it seems quite possible that Fox Company has mistaken Hill 85 for Hill 81. (They're only a kilometer apart.) By shifting 3d Platoon (and possibly even 2d) to Hill 87 we might be able to reconstitute the blocking position on Hills 85–87–88 vice Hills 81–88–82 as originally ordered, satisfying the regimental commander's original intent. Even if Fox is not on Hill 85, Hill 87 is some 500 meters west and south of Hill 88 (but still in our sector). From Hill 87 we would therefore be in a much better position to try to bottle up the enemy forces that are crossing the ridge west of Hill 81.

**More on Intent**

There is no particular format that a commander's intent must take. In addition to being one of the most important parts of an order to issue, the intent is also one of the most difficult to prepare because it requires the commander to express a qualitative vision of how he wants the operation to turn out. A couple of possible techniques for expressing intent are:

• To follow each task assigned to a subordinate with an " . . . in order to . . . " statement. For example: "Establish a blocking position in the vicinity of Hills 88 and 82 in order to prevent enemy forces from escaping south."

• As Capt Michael L. Ettore suggests in "Commander's Intent Defined," (*MCG*, Apr93), to begin the intent statement with "The final result desired is . . . " For example: "The final result desired is to prevent enemy forces from escaping south."

The statement of intent should be clear and forceful. As Capt Ettore points out, a concise intent statement is easier to transmit by radio or messenger and is more easily remembered under conditions of extreme stress. But don't sacrifice clarity for brevity.

The commander's intent is different from any other part of the order, and there is a definite skill to expressing it well. As you do the remaining scenarios in this workbook, focus on issuing a good commander's intent, and afterwards analyze it to determine if it serves its bottom-line purpose of giving your subordinates the ability to deviate from the plan and still support your desires. USMC

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# Securing Cam-Pljuna

*"Weigh the situation, then move. He who knows the art of the direct and the indirect approach will be victorious. Such is the art of maneuvering."*

*—Sun Tzu*

*"Originality is the most vital of all military virtues."*

*—B. H. Liddell-Hart*

**Mission Tactics II**

This mission is a straightforward one, in which our battalion commander has given us broad latitude in the manner of execution. The only condition he has imposed is the deadline, and even that is not particularly constraining. Moreover, to guide us in our actions he has explained the intent behind the operation and how the operation fits into the scheme of the larger upcoming campaign. He has furthermore made us the battalion's main effort, offering us any weapons company assets we might need and ensuring timely reinforcements by helicopter. All in all, we have the opportunity to weigh the situation thoroughly and the freedom to construct an original plan that we're happy with.

**Looking for Patterns**

"Securing Cam-Pljuna" shares several similarities with " 'Film at Eleven' ." Both involve a straightforward mission to seize a specific location for future use. In both cases time is not a particularly significant consideration; we have a reasonable amount of time to accomplish the mission. Both involve operations in populated areas, with the consequent need to exercise restraint so to limit collateral damage. In both cases the enemy force is not particularly large. The problem will not be seizing the objective; it will be minimizing damage to ourselves and the locals. One key area in which the scenarios differ, however, is that at Cam-Pljuna we can expect the enemy to resist. At Oasis the situation with regard to the enemy was much more ambiguous, and that always complicates things. Knowing that we can expect the enemy at Cam-Pljuna to fight may not make accomplishing the mission any easier, but it certainly makes the situation less ambiguous.

**Uncertainty—A Fact of Life**

As at Oasis, we don't know much about the enemy situation. We know where his mortar and antiaircraft gun emplacements are, and we know the defensive positions he has prepared. But we don't know the actual dispositions of the main enemy forces. Nor do we know the current location of the mobile machinegun units, which may or may not be present when we make our attack. And of course, we don't know with any certainty—and never will—the enemy's exact intentions. Even in this age of high-tech sensors, there will always be much about the enemy situation that will remain uncertain. The predominant feature of tactical decisionmaking is the pervasive uncertainty that surrounds every decision. Information will always be incomplete, will often be confusing, and will sometimes even be contradictory. If we wait for certainty before making a decision, we'll never act. The requirement is to recognize uncertainty as a fact of life and to learn to deal with it.

**Flexibility**

Because the enemy situation is uncertain, our plan has to be flexible to allow us to adapt to a variety of circumstances and developments. Our initial operation order should not try to cover the entire operation all the way through to conclusion, because there's still too much about the situation that we don't know. Our initial order can probably cover the approach march in detail, but specific actions after that will probably depend on how the situation develops. About the best we can do at this point is to prepare our company for future actions by issuing warning orders which describe our broad intent, likely anticipated tasks, and possible contingencies. For the units whose missions we know with reasonable certainty—tak-

ing out the antiair or mortar positions or blocking the Pandjeton road, for example—we can be more specific. But by and large, the detailed plan for actions in the objective area will have to come later, through the issuance of improvised fragmentary orders, as the situation develops and becomes clearer. This is when having good immediate action drills and standing operating procedures and a cohesive team with trustworthy subordinate leaders will pay dividends. In general, the less certain a situation is, the fewer forces should be committed initially to specific tasks, and the more should be held back ready to commit as the situation develops.

**The Importance of Reconnaissance**

Gen George S. Patton said, "You can never have too much reconnaissance," and this scenario is a perfect example of that adage. Our success at Cam-Pljuna will depend in large measure on our ability to generate information ourselves about the enemy situation through reconnaissance.

Exactly what information do we want to generate? There are a relatively few essential elements of information that will go a long way toward clearing up our picture of the situation at Cam-Pljuna. Everyone in the company should know these questions and should be instructed to keep their eyes open for the answers:

- Where are the main Early Retirist forces?
- Are the mobile machinegun units in or near Cam-Pljuna?
- Are the antiair and mortar units still where last reported?

Equally important, anyone who sees the answers to these questions must know to pass that information on, both up and down the chain of command.

Reconnaissance is not a specialized mission reserved for special units. It should be an on-going activity in every combat unit. As we discussed in the section on "Surfaces and Gaps," we should be continuously and actively probing down to the lowest levels for enemy vulnerabilities that we can exploit.

**Exploiting Critical Vulnerabilities**

Are there any critical vulnerabilities in the enemy dispositions as we currently know them, any weak spots we can exploit to gain leverage? The enemy defensive preparations are oriented to the south and east—i.e., directly toward us. There is only one defensive position northwest of the town. Importantly, the enemy has no defensive positions to the northeast.

Meanwhile, the critical points in this scenario—at least the ones we know with any certainty—are to the west of town: the antiair and mortar positions and the landing zone (LZ). Likewise, enemy reinforcements will come from the west via the Pendjetan road.

The antiair positions are critical to this scenario because they command the LZ. (We can't take them out with supporting arms because of their proximity to local residences.) If we take out the antiair positions, we can begin to land helicopters. This is important because it facilitates immediate relief operations as per our orders, and it allows for the early introduction of reinforcements. The early introduction of reinforcements strengthens our hand no matter how the situation develops, especially since at the same time we could be blocking off enemy reinforcements via the Pendjetan road.

**“Information will always be incomplete, will often be confusing, and will sometimes even be contradictory. If we wait for certainty before making a decision, we'll never act. The requirement is to recognize uncertainty as a fact of life. . . .”**

Thus, a basic concept for our plan might call for an approach via the apparent gap northeast of town to capture the antiair and mortar positions and the LZ.

**Possibilities—Infiltration Attack**

An infantry force infiltrating through the woods could cross the Bensjkula road northeast of Cam-Pljuna and move in a counterclockwise direction around the north and west sides of town, putting itself in position to attack the antiair and mortar positions, secure the LZ, and block the Pendjetan road. Moving around to the north vice the south, in addition to exploiting natural vulnerabilities in the enemy disposition, has the advantage—being on the slopes above the town—of offering better observation of the objective area, which may be very valuable as we continue to develop our plans.

Because we've got time, the force can move carefully to avoid detection. By moving at night we can take advantage of the enemy's poor night-vision capability. Attack elements could move into position to launch simultaneous surprise attacks against the key known positions. We could hold other elements (one or even two platoons) in reserve to deal with the developing situation. We might make arrangements with battalion for a conspicuous feint up the Cam-Pljuna road—vehicles making a slow, plodding and noisy advance—to keep the enemy's attention fixed to the southeast. The ideal situation would be to be able to keep the enemy oriented southeast, occupying primarily the three positions around Hill 290: this could allow us to take the city proper from behind with minimal damage to the locals as well as to attack the enemy positions themselves from the rear.

**What Weapons Company Assets Do We Want?**

Assuming that we will not be moving with vehicles up the Cam-Pljuna road, our decision of what extra weapons to bring will be guided primarily by what we can reasonably man-pack over forested mountain terrain. But even within that restriction there is still plenty of room for differences. A lot depends on our concept of operations. Is our plan based primarily on speed and surprise or on superior firepower? I would argue that for the sake of mobility we want to travel light and carry the minimum gear necessary. Perhaps we can arrange to have certain heavier weapons brought in by helicopter in the initial wave of reinforcements.

We can probably do without mortars, relying instead on artillery. There is no significant armor threat, but at least some bunker-busting capability would help. We also want the capability to stop the mobile machinegun unit or enemy reinforcements by vehicle. Perhaps a few Dragon teams at most. Machineguns could be very valuable, both as part of a roadblock and because the terrain offers numerous opportunities for massing machineguns in a base of fire. Would the increased firepower of heavy machineguns be worth the loss of mobility they would cause? Or might we be better served by requesting reinforcement with another section of M60s from another line company? US MC

# Raid on Gazebo Ridge

*"Speed is the essence of war. Take advantage of the enemy's unpreparedness; travel by unexpected routes and strike him where he has taken no precautions."*

*—Sun Tzu*

*"The principles on which I planned all operations were:*
- *The ultimate intention must be an offensive one.*
- *The main idea on which the plan was based must be simple.*
- *That idea must be held in view throughout and everything else must give way to it.*
- *The plan must have an element of surprise."*

*—Field Marshal Sir William Slim*

**SSS&B**

This is a situation ripe with both danger and opportunity. We have caught the enemy unprepared and have a chance to wreak havoc. But we are also entering a fishbowl lined with with enemy guns and enemy tanks on both flanks that can make life miserable for us. We are badly outnumbered. Success and survival depend on acting quickly and aggressively before the enemy can get his bearings. Nearly all of the *MCG* readers who submitted solutions to this scenario when it first appeared in Sep90 recognized that the keys to success at Gazebo Ridge were *speed, simplicity, surprise,* and *boldness*: Hit fast, hit hard, and get out quick.

**Speed**

In nearly all of the previous scenarios—the possible exceptions being " 'Film at Eleven' " and "Seizing Cam-Pljuna"—speed has been an important ingredient. Even in those two scenarios, in which we seemed to have plenty of time to develop our plan, once we put the plan into action and came into contact with the enemy, speed of execution became important. In fact, of all the concepts we have discussed to this point, there is none more important than speed—the ability to think fast, decide fast, act fast, move fast. Actually, it's not so much absolute speed that matters, but speed relative to our enemy. As military theorist Col John Boyd, USAF(Ret), is fond of saying, it doesn't matter if we're slow, as long as the enemy is slower.

Back in the late 1960s and early 1970s, BGen F. P. Henderson, USMC(Ret), and other Marines were talking and writing about a sequence of essential combat actions referred to as SEDA (Sense-Evaluate-Decide-Act). Boyd popularized this theory using the term "OODA loop" (Observation-Orientation-Decision-Action) to describe the fundamental time-competitive nature of conflict. The theory applies to any direct conflict, whether the antagonists are individual boxers, soccer teams, military units in combat, or businesses in a competitive market. It defines the cycle by which we make decisions in a competitive situation. Facing a competitive situation, we first sense the situation. We then evaluate it by making estimates, assumptions, analyses, and judgments. Based on that evaluation, we make our decision—i.e., we come up with a plan. Then we put the plan into action. Having acted, we have changed the situation, and so the cycle begins again. To be faster through the cycle once gives us the advantage of being able to seize the initiative, dictate the terms of action, and force the enemy to react to us. But the side which can consistently and effectively transition through the SEDA cycle or OODA loop faster—the side which maintains a higher tempo—gains an ever-increasing advantage with each cycle. The slower antagonist falls further and further behind in his reactions and becomes increasingly unable to cope with the deteriorating situation. With each cycle his actions become less relevant to what's actually happening, and he becomes increasingly ineffective.

It's precisely because of the importance of speed that the TDGs generally have such a rigorous time limit. It's not just the ability to move fast—although that certainly is part of it—but

the ability to think fast and decide fast.

As a rule we want to do everything we can to improve our own speed: decentralize decisionmaking authority, minimize restrictive control measures, simplify our plans, make maximum use of immediate action drills and standing operating procedures, and streamline our decisionmaking and staff planning procedures. Likewise, since combat is time-competitive, we want to do everything we can to slow our enemy down.

As this scenario demonstrates, speed also has a protective element. It makes it harder to catch us, harder to hit us, and harder to fend off our thrusts.

**Simplicity**

At Gazebo Ridge there is no time for detailed coordination or instructions; this will have to be a hasty and improvised attack with our subordinates acting on their understanding of the commander's intent and the developing situation. If this turns into a confused and chaotic melee, fine; that serves our purpose of distracting the enemy. The bottom line is, the simpler the better.

How do we get simplicity? First, we develop a plan that has few "moving parts"—i.e., few different tasks or components. The more moving parts a plan has, the more elaborate it becomes. Fewer moving parts lessens the need for coordination, detailed instructions, control measures, etc. In our particular case it shouldn't be hard to keep it simple, since we have so few assets to work with. The simplest plan would be to keep our company together as a single unit and have the different weapons systems engage appropriate targets as we pass. Since we have only two sections of LAV-25s (the backbone of our unit) we certainly don't want to have any more than two main thrusts to our attack—in this situation, any more than two thrusts will start to get difficult to control.

LtCol Kenneth W. Estes suggested task organizing into two platoons each with three LAV-25s, an LAV-AG, and an LAV-AT—"That way I command two platoons of equal weight, not four different sections." In this case, there is something to be said for a two-pronged attack vice a single thrust. It would likely cause more confusion and disruption, which is our ultimate objective. Moreover, as we've discussed before, the use of separate but complementary forces compels the enemy to split his efforts.

The second way we maintain simplicity is to minimize the amount of direct coordination and positive control necessary to make the plan work. In this scenario, even if we come up with a two-pronged plan, we want to make sure that each element can execute its part of the plan independently, without having to coordinate with and worry about interference from the other element. The two forces can still complement each other, but in an indirect way. In other words, the plan fits together "loosely." What we absolutely *don't* want is a plan in which all the elements are precisely synchronized and there is little tolerance for friction or anything going wrong. An example of this is a plan in which A happens after B takes place, but B can't happen until C occurs; C has to happen simultaneously with D, etc. If any one part of the plan is disrupted, the whole plan begins to fall apart. (In general, plans with a lot of "on-order" tasks, in which the commander directs each action, are good examples of operations with little tolerance for the natural friction of war.) To make an analogy, it's kind of like the difference between the music of a jazzhall band and an orchestra. In the orchestra, each instrument must respond to the positive control of the conductor and be precisely synchronized with the others; the music is, as the name indicates, orchestrated. The jazzhall band's music, on the other hand, is "looser," with room for improvisation and creativity. The bottom line is that we want to be more like a jazzhall band and less like an orchestra. We want our plans to fit together "loosely," so they do not have to be carefully orchestrated; so they are not as easily disrupted by fog, friction, and enemy action; and so we have room to improvise and show initiative as the situation warrants.

**"... the side which can consistently and effectively transition through the SEDA cycle or OODA loop faster—the side which maintains a higher tempo—gains an ever-increasing advantage with each cycle."**

**Surprise**

We are vastly outnumbered and outgunned in this scenario. The only reason we can even think of attacking is that we seem to have the element of surprise. A multiplier of combat power, surprise is a concept of such importance as to rate as a tactical fundamental.

Clausewitz observed that the desire for surprise is "more or less basic to all operations, for without it superiority at the decisive point is hardly conceivable." But beyond being a necessary precondition for local superiority, surprise is a fundamental in its own right because of its psychological effect. As *FMFM 1* says, "Surprise can decisively affect the outcome of combat far beyond the physical means at hand."

It is interesting that we should use the "Raid on Gazebo Ridge" to introduce the concept of surprise because we typically think of surprise as the product of some devious and roundabout scheme—anything but driving straight at the enemy in growing daylight by the most direct route. But, in fact, this scenario illustrates the important point that although we often talk about "taking the enemy by surprise," surprise is not so much something the surpriser does. Rather it is a state of shock on the part of the surprised as the result of some unexpected event that leaves him temporarily unable to respond effectively. We may take certain actions intended to surprise the enemy, but success in the end depends ultimately on the enemy's susceptibility to being surprised. Typically, for example, we seek to surprise the enemy by striking his flanks, but if the enemy expects a flank attack the surprise will be on us. In other words, surprise comes down to *expectations*. The first requirement, then, in achieving surprise is to be able to anticipate the enemy's expectations. We try to look at the situation from the enemy's point of view, figure out his expectations, and then do the thing he least expects. As we've already done in previous scenarios, we ask: "What's the enemy up to?"

While surprise can be decisive, because it is not completely under our control, we should not count on it alone for the margin of success. For surprise to work, it's not necessary to take the enemy unawares. It's only important that he become aware too late to react. As a result, surprise is a product of speed and secrecy—secrecy so that the enemy does not become aware until too late, and speed so that once

he does become aware he doesn't have the time to react effectively.

**Boldness**

Boldness also is a key factor in the "Raid on Gazebo Ridge." Much like surprise, boldness is a true force multiplier. As Clausewitz observed:

> Indeed in what field of human activity is boldness more at home than in war? . . . It must be granted a certain power over and above successful calculation involving space, time, and magnitude of forces, for where it is superior, it will take advantage of its opponent's weakness. In other words, it is a genuinely creative force.

Boldness can contribute to surprise and add shock effect to our actions.

**A Sample FragO**

The following fragmentary order, submitted by LtCol Estes, is not meant as the only "right" answer, but as an excellent example of a clear and crisp order for a quick, simple, and bold plan:

> "Action right front: left platoon attack enemy artillery; right platoon attack enemy command post; no decisive engagement; withdraw to south and west through their log train; watch out for the tanks to the south; make smoke; NOW. Cobras, attack tanks on our left, cover our withdrawal. FO, try to get immediate smoke and ICM fire on the northern tanks."
>
> [I ask the Company B commander to take on that tank unit (on the northern part of the escarpment) as mutual support, then call the Company C commander to relay a sitrep to the battalion commander, asking that Company C support me by fire and maneuver.]

Notice that in this solution, our company commander asks Company B to the north to engage the enemy tank position on the northern end of the position and also asks the Company C commander to support our company. Because his company has been designated the main effort, our company commander knows that the job of the other companies is to support us, and so, in a pinch, without referring to the battalion commander, he can seek their support, and they are obligated to respond.

**Historical Background**

This scenario is based on an actual action from Robert Crisp's excellent memoir of the North African campaign of World War II, *Brazen Chariots* (New York: Bantam Books, 1978). During Operation CRUSADER, Capt Crisp commanded an understrength tank squadron as part of a raid against the rear of a German position pressuring an Indian division south of Gazala. Crisp's squadron was equipped with Stuarts, a light U.S. tank that was outgunned by, but faster than, the German Marks.

As he approached the rear of the German position in the daylight, apparently unrecognized by the Germans, Crisp lost communications with higher headquarters.

> [As] I was not in touch with [headquarters], I proposed to act on my own initiative. The plan I had in mind was to make a charge in line abreast, straight towards the middle of the rear of the German position. When we reached it we would swing north in line ahead, and run along the whole length of the enemy lines blazing away with everything we had before wheeling out and away at full speed. It was the sort of recklessness that was, in fact, pretty safe in execution. By the time the Jerries had woken up to what was happening we would be in the middle of them, every gun firing and every tank going flat out. None of their weapons would be ready for us; they were all directed towards the east and the Indian division. They would not be able to engage us while we were right in their own position. By the time we swung out again there would be so much consternation and confusion, and we would be going so fast, that I had every prospect of getting away with it scot-free—without losing a single tank. . . . I was about to summon troop commanders to a quick conference back at my tank (it would have to be darn quick) when one of them came on the air to report four enemy tanks moving out from the left and coming across his front.

Crisp was seriously wounded in the ensuing firefight while trying to rescue the crew of a disabled tank. An intercepted wireless message from the headquarters of the Afrika Corps revealed that the Germans were evacuating the Gazala position, lucky in their opinion to have escaped a "steel trap."

USMC

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

# Enemy Over the Bridge

*"To move swiftly, strike vigorously, and secure all the fruits of the victory is the secret of successful war."*

*—Stonewall Jackson*

*"The measure may be thought bold, but I am of opinion the boldest are the safest."*

*—Adm Lord Nelson*

**Looking at the "Big Picture"—Again**

Since "Enemy Over the Bridge" was the very first TDG to appear in the *MCG* (Apr90), it is appropriate that this scenario returns us to the first of the tactical first principles discussed in this book—the importance of considering the larger situation. In this situation, there is no way our battalion commander can make the right choice unless he considers the division situation. The key question is, What can I do to further the accomplishment of the division mission?

**Speed—Again**

And it is also significant that we see yet again that all-important concept of speed, which is critical to every tactical situation. This scenario amounts to a meeting engagement, an unexpected meeting between two forces not fully deployed for combat. In any meeting engagement it is important to beat the enemy to the punch, to act quickly and aggressively to seize the initiative and gain the critical advantage. No matter what your solution to this problem may be, it should reflect a definite sense of urgency in acting more quickly than the enemy.

**Friction and Uncertainty**

Perhaps better than any of the others, this scenario also illustrates the important related concepts of friction and uncertainty. On the surface, this ought to be an easy situation for us. We're making a simple administrative move into an assembly area in our own supposedly secure rear area. It's not even a tactical situation. Friendly forces hold the bridge and riverline with security forces operating farther forward. But we discover nothing is as it should be. There are, in fact, no friendly forces at the bridge or along the river. A sizable enemy force occupies our assembly area. We don't know exactly how big the enemy force is. We don't know what other areas, if any, the enemy has occupied. We don't know the enemy's intentions. We have no idea what happened to the friendly forces that were supposed to be forward of us. About all we do know is that the situation is not good and is nothing like we expected. Consequently, the instructions we've received are no longer appropriate. The bottom line is that we have to use our initiative to retrieve the situation.

**"In any meeting engagement it is important to beat the enemy to the punch, to act quickly and aggressively to seize the initiative and gain the critical advantage. No matter what your solution to this problem may be, it should reflect a definite sense of urgency in acting more quickly than the enemy."**

**What's the Enemy Up To?**

As we've discussed, we don't know what the enemy's up to. But we can work through some possibilities. On one extreme, this action may be the beginning of a major enemy offensive, in which case we can expect substantial enemy forces to begin pouring across the bridge soon. If that's the case, the enemy has beaten our division to the punch, and we need to try to contain the problem. On the other extreme, this may be nothing more than a local spoiling attack, in which case the enemy has succeeded in seizing the initiative and threatening to hamstring our offensive. If that's the case, we need to regain the initiative and get the division offensive back on track.

**What's Critical?**

What's critical in this situation? Thinking strictly at the battalion level, we might answer, "The enemy force occupying our assembly area. We were told to occupy that piece of terrain, and the enemy is preventing us from doing it." But how important is that triangular piece of woods? Not very; it has no inherent tactical value and, in fact, is hemmed in by the two hill masses to the south. Occupying the assigned assembly area is no longer appropriate since the situation has changed dramatically. An assembly area is merely a control measure designed to facilitate future preparations. As we've already discussed, we shouldn't let control measures get in the way of good tactics. And how much of a threat does the enemy force really pose in its current position? Can the division still use the bridge? Yes; as long as we can contain the enemy the division can still reach the bridge via the East Farm road. The hills south of the assembly area are important because if the enemy can control them he can begin to solidify his bridge-

head, and if we can control them we can contain the enemy. As Maj Leonard A. Blasiol observed, the east hill is more important of the two because it "controls both of the roads available to the division for its advance to the river."

Looking at the larger situation, we realize that the situation at the bridge is much more significant. If the division attack is going to go off as scheduled, we have to have the bridge. Even if the attack will have to be delayed, the situation will get worse as long as the enemy holds the bridge. The enemy continues to funnel forces across the bridge, so every passing minute means more enemy forces south of the river that we have to deal with. We don't want the division to have to launch its attack just to regain the bridge. And there is always the chance that the enemy will prepare the bridge for demolition. The bottom line is that although the enemy in the assembly area may be the immediate problem, the more critical problem is the bridge. To keep a potentially bad situation from getting worse and to facilitate the division's offensive, we must secure the bridge. In his solution to "Enemy Over the Bridge" when it first appeared in the *MCG*, Mr. Stephen V. Cole captured it most succinctly: "The key point is the bridge. The situation will continue to deteriorate as long as the bridge is in enemy hands. Therefore, capture of the bridge is the highest priority . . . "

### What's Vulnerable?

All we know of the enemy disposition is that he occupies the assembly area in strength and continues to move south across the bridge. So to attack into the assembly area is to attack directly into the known strength of the enemy. The enemy's lines of operation run north-south from the bridge to the assembly area, so he is vulnerable to a flanking attack that threatens to sever that line from the east or west. Most threatening is an attack at the bridge—the key link in the enemy's lines of operation. The East Farm road seems to offer the most covered and concealed route for doing this.

### The Critical Vulnerability

The bridge holds the key to this whole situation. It clearly is the most critical point on the battlefield, both for us and for the enemy. If we recapture the bridge we restore the division's attack plans for the morning, and we make the enemy's position south of the river desperate.

### Focus of Efforts/Main Effort

It's not enough merely to identify the enemy's critical vulnerability. There is a corresponding concept involving the focus of friendly effort* that ranks as a true tactical fundamental. Having identified a critical enemy vulnerability, we must go after it ruthlessly and with all the strength we can muster. We must concentrate our efforts against it. *FMFM 1* discusses the concept this way:

> Of all the efforts going on within our command, we recognize the focus of effort as the most critical to success. All other efforts must support it. In effect, we have decided: *This is how I will achieve a decision; everything else is secondary.*
>
> We cannot take lightly the decision of where and when to focus our effort. Since the focus of effort represents our bid for victory, we must direct it at that object which will cause the most decisive damage to the enemy and which holds the best opportunity of success. It involves a physical and moral commitment, although not an irretrievable one. It forces us to concentrate decisive combat power just as it forces us to accept risk. Thus, we focus our effort against *critical enemy vulnerability*, exercising strict economy elsewhere.

In this situation we have realized that capturing the bridge is the crucial act. Everything else is secondary. Who controls the bridge controls the situation; everything else will fall into place. Therefore, we should ruthlessly concentrate all our efforts and assets toward that essential task, ensuring overwhelming local superiority. Moreover, we judge any other secondary effort on how it supports the main effort. *FMFM 1* explains:

> Like the commander's intent, the focus of effort becomes a harmonizing force. Faced with a decision, we ask ourselves: "How can I best support the focus of effort?"

For example, we have already decided that we can't simply ignore the enemy in the assembly area; we must contain the enemy force there. So we can definitely justify allocating forces to deal with the enemy in the assembly area, but we want to allocate no more forces than necessary. So how do we distribute our forces between the bridge and the assembly area?

Because time is critical we definitely want to commit our most mobile units—the motorized infantry and tank companies and the TOWs—to the bridge. Several *MCG* readers suggested sending the whole battalion to the bridge and fixing the enemy with supporting arms. That certainly demonstrates a willingness to concentrate ruthlessly at the critical spot and to accept risk elsewhere. Other readers, on the other hand, saw merit in occupying the enemy's attention to the south by a ground attack on the assembly area. (But, importantly, the object was not to attack for the sake of capturing the assembly area, but to support the main effort at the bridge.) Many readers committed only the motorized and tank units to the bridge and used the foot-mobile companies in the assembly area—essentially splitting their forces evenly between the two tasks—precisely because of the critical time factor. The foot-mobile companies would not be able to keep up with the other elements on the road to participate in the attack at the bridge in the first place. As Maj Blasiol explained in his solution:

> My vehicular-mobile units will take advantage of the high-speed avenue of approach leading around the enemy's east flank. . . . My foot-mobile units will operate in the terrain best suited for them: the forest and high ground.

### Differences in Mobility

This issue illustrates an interesting point—the differing degrees of mobility among the elements of our force. The motorized and tank elements have far superior mobility on the roads and open areas compared to the foot infantry, which has superior mobility in the woods and other restricted areas. Even within the so-called "mo-

**“It's not enough merely to identify the enemy's critical vulnerability. There is a corresponding concept involving the focus of friendly effort that ranks as a true tactical fundamental. Having identified a critical enemy vulnerability, we must go after it ruthlessly and with all the strength we can muster.”**

*While FMFM 1 refers to the focus of effort(s) or point of main effort, Doctrine Division at Quantico now prefers the term "main effort." The concept, however, remains unchanged.

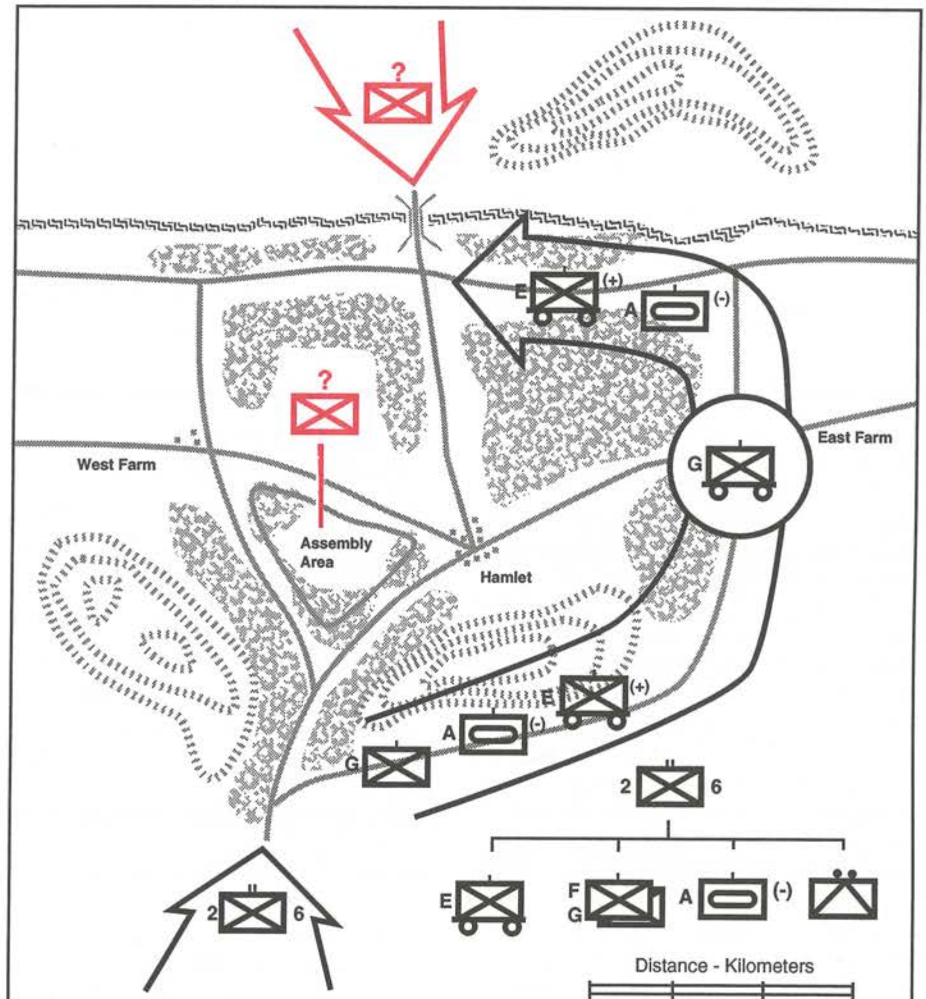
bile" elements, the tank and truck-mounted elements can travel different speeds on different surfaces. Moreover, tactical mobility is not merely a matter of the speed at which a unit can travel over a given surface. For example, the armor protection of our tanks gives them mobility in the face of certain types of enemy fire that unarmored units lack.

Differences in mobility can be both a drawback and an advantage. They can be an advantage in that they give us the flexibility to move in a broad variety of terrain and conditions. They can be a problem, as in this scenario, when they prevent us from being able to concentrate all our forces as we might desire. *In general, a unit assigned a single task ought to have roughly uniform mobility.*

### The Reserve

There is another issue affecting both the questions of the distribution of forces and of mobility that we have not yet discussed—the reserve. The reserve is a part of the force held under the control of the commander as a maneuvering force to influence future action. The reserve is the means by which the commander deals with unforeseen problems and exploits unexpected opportunities. In other words, the reserve provides flexibility in the face of uncertain conditions. In general, the more uncertain the situation, the greater the need for a reserve and the larger it should be. Given the uncertainty of this particular situation, a reserve is a good idea. The reserve should have the capability to deal with a variety of situations, and it should have the mobility to get quickly to where it's needed. Since we're going to commit our reserve at a critical stage in the battle, we want it to be strong, and we want it to be fast.

**"... the reserve provides flexiblity in the face of uncertain conditions. In general, the more uncertain the situation, the greater the need for a reserve and the larger it should be."**




Discussion #9

This is especially true in our scenario in which the two main actions are 4 or 5 kilometers apart. The problem is that if we commit our "mobile" units to the bridge and one foot infantry company to the assembly area, this leaves us with a foot-mobile unit as our reserve. A foot-mobile reserve would likely lack the mobility to react quickly to the critical spot on the battlefield.

There are a couple of things we can do to deal with this problem. The first solution is the careful positioning of the reserve so that it is within reach when we need it. In general we should position our reserve in a central location, which does not necessarily mean in the middle but in a location where it can access any critical spot on the battlefield. However, if we anticipate committing our reserve in a specific area we may want to hedge our bets by moving it closer to that area. In this scenario, for example, a reserve located at East Farm—even though apparently far to the east—is within easy striking distance of the key location, the bridge, but can also strike south and west quickly by road. Moreover positioning our reserve at East Farm protects our route to the bridge via East Farm road.

The second solution, specific to this situation, is to shift our trucks to improve the mobility of our reserve company. Once Company E reaches the bridge, it no longer has need for its trucks; its mission requires it to hold its position. We can detach the trucks and reassign them to our reserve rifle company, which can already have started to march toward East Farm.

### A Sample FragO

The following is an example of a fragmentary order based on the previous discussion. It is not meant as the "right" answer, but as food for thought.

> The battalion attacks immediately to seize the bridge in order to cut off the flow of enemy forces south and to secure a bridgehead for the division's attack at 0400 tomorrow. I intend to control a bridgehead north of the river and to contain the enemy forces south of the river.

Echo [on trucks], with TOWs attached and reinforced by Tanks, attacks as rapidly as possible by way of East Farm road to secure the bridgehead and sever the enemy movement south. You are main effort. When you get to the bridge, send the trucks back for Golf, who'll be marching up the East Farm road.

Tanks, reinforce Echo; be prepared to continue the attack north or to attack south to destroy the enemy south of the river.

Fox probes north in order to determine the size of the enemy force and contain it in the assembly area. Control the east hill in order to ensure our continued use of East Farm road. Most important, keep the enemy force fixed where it is so it can't interfere with advance of Regiment.

**"Acting with initiative does not give us license to leave others—adjacent units or higher headquarters—in the dark. . . . there's no reason that we can't advise regiment of the new situation and the action we're taking."**

Golf is in reserve. Take up position near the East Farm from which you can protect East Farm road; be prepared to reinforce Echo at the bridge or to attack west toward Hamlet to destroy the enemy. You'll pick up Echo's trucks en route back from the bridge.

I'll be with Echo and Tanks.

### A Final Thought—Keep Higher Headquarters Informed

Acting with initiative does not give us license to leave others—adjacent units or higher headquarters—in the dark. As Maj Francis X. Bergmeister pointed out in his solution, while we certainly should not wait for instructions in this situation, there's no reason that we can't advise regiment of the new situation and the action we're taking. The sooner we do, the sooner regiment can support us. USMC

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# Gap at the Bridge

*"Nothing is more worthy of the attention of a good general than the endeavor to penetrate the designs of the enemy."*
*—Niccolo Machiavelli*

*"Therefore I say: 'Know the enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in danger.' "*
*—Sun Tzu*

**Know Your Enemy**

Did the fact that you played this game from the other side in the previous scenario—and probably opted for an attack by the East Farm road—influence your plan now that you are on the other side of the fence? It should. The foreknowledge you gained from having already seen this problem through the enemy's eyes did not solve the problem for you but it certainly should have given you some valuable insights. It is not enough to understand an enemy's capabilities and doctrine. We also have to try to get inside our enemy's head, to try to see the situation and the terrain from his point of view, with the intent of anticipating his actions. If we can anticipate our enemy's actions, then we can be waiting in ambush for him, and we can make him pay.

While it's always helpful to try to figure out what our enemy is up to, we should not delude ourselves into thinking that we know exactly what he's going to do and exclude all other possibilities. If we fall into that dangerous trap we're likely to get surprised ourselves. We should not only consider what we think the enemy *will* do, but what he *might* do and what he *can* do. As Helmuth von Moltke said, "You will usually find that the enemy has three courses open to him, and of these he will adopt the fourth." While it is dangerous and reckless to gamble that we have figured out with certitude what the enemy will do, it helps immensely to focus on him and consider the options available to him. One thing we can never go wrong by asking: "What is the enemy up to?"

**Exploitation**

This scenario illustrates the concept of surfaces and gaps at work. The battalion advance south across the river (to be reinforced by regiment) isn't the result of some plan devised at higher headquarters, but rather of the initiative of an aggressive patrol leader and the readiness of each successive commander to quickly and decisively exploit the situation. The actions of that patrol leader could turn out to be critical to the *division's* upcoming offensive. This is a clear example of a small unit "pulling" a larger unit through a gap.

**"We also have to try to get inside our enemy's head, to try to see the situation and the terrain from his point of view, with the intent of anticipating his actions."**

This approach requires a ruthlessly exploitive mindset. Given an inch, we should be looking to take a yard. We must be constantly looking for opportunities and then jumping on them when we find them. And like the boxer who has stunned his opponent, once we get the enemy on the ropes, we want to redouble our efforts to go for the knockout blow. In general, the best way to exploit success is not to stop and consolidate what we have but to keep pushing.

**The Bigger Picture**

The key to success in this scenario is to deny the enemy a bridgehead north of the river at all costs until regiment can send reinforcements. Without a bridgehead the enemy can't effectively launch his offensive in this zone. Moreover, realizing that the division commander intends to go on the offensive soon, we know that a friendly bridgehead south of the river would be a huge advantage. If all else fails, we must deny the bridge to the enemy. But our more ambitious object should be to retain a consolidated bridgehead south of the river from which division

can launch its upcoming offensive. As Capt Robert M. Sellers pointed out in his solution to this problem, there are other reasons for not simply "hunkering" down to defend the bridge. First, we don't want to surrender the initiative to the enemy. Second, the sooner and farther south we meet the enemy, the more room (and, consequently, more time) we have to work with—in other words, the more delay we can impose on the enemy. And third, our

**“While it's always helpful to try to figure out what our enemy is up to, we should not delude ourselves into thinking that we know exactly what he's going to do and exclude all other possibilities.”**

Company A, on foot, is already too far south to withdraw to the bridge in time against a motorized enemy.

### Speed, Speed, Speed

As we saw clearly in the previous scenario (and in practically every scenario before that), speed is a critical factor. The side that acts faster will have the upper hand. It is every bit as true as it was 2,500 years ago when Euripides wrote it: "The god of war hates those who hesitate."

### Firepower

Also critical to this situation is the timely and effective use of firepower. In his solution to the problem, Mr. Carl F. Kusch went so far as to designate his battalion fire support coordinator as the main effort:

> For this initial phase, the POME [point of main effort] will be the fire support coordinator! Our supporting arms assets are the only weapons with which we can *immediately* strike the enemy and give us time to get into position for the next phase of this battle. Therefore, it is imperative that you (the FSC) bring *all available* fire support assets to bear on the enemy in the vicinity of TRP [target reference point] #1 [the road fork south of the hills].

For the same reason, several readers suggested that the STA team, the only friendly unit that can initially observe the enemy main body and therefore the unit which would be controlling the initial fire missions, should be designated initially as the main effort.

Either way, the point is that hitting the enemy quickly with massed firepower is imperative in this situation. We should take the regimental commander up on his offer of massed fire support. As Mr. Kusch pointed out, it is the one unit we have with which we can immediately engage the enemy. The object would not be to completely destroy, or even halt, the enemy column, but to delay and disrupt it so that we can gain the initiative. Field Marshal Erwin Rommel remarked that:

> I have found again and again that in encounter actions [i.e., meeting engagements], the day goes to the side that is the first to plaster its opponent with fire. The man who lies low and waits developments usually comes off second best.

### Key Terrain

There are several key locations to this situation. First is the bridge, the importance of which is self-explanatory. If all else fails, we need to hold the bridge at all costs and may want to dedicate one company to that mission. Company C is just arriving at the bridge and, being foot mobile, lacks the mobility to be employed almost anywhere else.

As we saw in "Enemy Over the Bridge," the hills south and southwest of Hamlet are important because they provide a natural bridgehead defense and command all movement toward the bridge. Moreover, by controlling those hills we would be providing an excellent offensive bridgehead from which to launch the upcoming division offensive.

From the attacker's perspective in "Enemy Over the Bridge," Hamlet was not particularly important, but it is to us in this scenario. Centrally located, Hamlet is like the hub of a wheel with spokes radiating outward; from there we can strike quickly in any direction on interior lines. The enemy, on the other hand, must move on exterior lines—i.e., around the rim of the wheel. No matter which way he moves, even if he moves first, we can intercept him.

If "Enemy Over the Bridge" is any indication, the enemy will probably go for the bridge via the East Farm road. So the East Farm area becomes key. We could quickly move our mobile forces to East Farm to block this likely enemy move. But if the enemy does not go this way, our main striking force is then out of position. While we *expect* the enemy to use the East Farm road, we shouldn't gamble all our hopes on that eventuality.

By controlling the high ground and Hamlet, we maintain the flexibility to deal with whatever course the enemy takes. If he tries to drive straight up the middle, fine; he must drive through our entire battalion arrayed in depth. That will be a costly and time-consuming operation, which thus plays into our hands. If he drives east we use our interior lines to strike him in the flank at East Farm on terrain suitable for our tanks and TOWs. If he swings west, fine; our mobile forces can strike just as easily toward West Farm. And if the enemy somehow manages to get by us to east or west, we can still cut him off at the bridge by driving due north from Hamlet.

### Differing Mobility & Capability

As with "Enemy Over the Bridge," we have a force consisting of units with different capabilities and degrees of mobility. The trick is to put these units to best use. Our foot-mobile infantry are best used in the woods and for positional missions, such as holding key locations. We've already discussed using Company C to hold the bridge. Likewise, we can use Company A, our southernmost company, to engage the enemy as far south as possible. This adds depth and definition to the battlefield. By developing the situation aggressively, Company A may

**“. . . once we get the enemy on the ropes, we want to redouble our efforts to go for the knockout blow. In general, the best way to exploit success is not to stop and consolidate what we have but to keep pushing.”**

be able to force the enemy to commit to a particular course of action.

We should try to use our motorized and tank units in a way that exploits their mobility over the road network radiating out of Hamlet. Because the situation is fairly vague and uncertain at this point, we might do well to put *all* our motorized and tank units into a large, central reserve at Hamlet, ready to strike the decisive blow in any direction. We should consider keeping our reserve company commander with us so that the person who will be re-

sponsible for striking the key blow can gain the same appreciation for the situation that we have and so that we can make certain he knows what we expect of him.

The concept, then, would call for a mobile defense, with our foot infantry providing depth and definition to the battlefield in the form of the blocking positions around which our mobile reserve would maneuver.

**Gaining and Maintaining the Initiative**

In this context, initiative does not mean the willingness to act on one's own authority, but rather the advantage of having the upper hand in battle. The two meanings, however, are obviously related for we use individual initiative to seize battlefield initiative. Field Marshal Slim said: "In war it is all-important to gain and retain the initiative, to make the enemy conform to the action, to dance to your tune." We typically think of gaining the initiative by offensive action, by striking first and not letting up. Gen Holland M. Smith wrote:

> Since I first joined the Marines, I have advocated aggressiveness in the field and constant offensive action. Hit quickly, hit hard, and keep right on hitting. Give the enemy no rest, no opportunity to consolidate his forces and hit back at you. This is the shortest road to victory.

And, in fact, this is probably the most common and direct way of seizing the initiative. But it is not the only way. Generally, by letting the enemy make the first move, we risk letting him gain the initiative—but not always. If we can anticipate our enemy's move and be ready for it, we can often hurt the enemy worse than if we had struck the first blow; we then act like the counterpunching boxer who lets his opponent expose himself by throwing a punch. More than a few of the Great Captains were great counterpunchers. For example, Hannibal's masterpieces at the Trebia, Lake Trasimene, and Cannae were all based on letting the Romans strike first and then crushing their flank when they did. (See the discussion for Scenario #12.) Although the enemy had initial freedom of action, Hannibal retained the initiative because he could anticipate the enemy's moves.

**"If we can anticipate our enemy's move and be ready for it, we can often hurt the enemy worse than if we had struck the first blow; we then act like the counterpunching boxer who lets his opponent expose himself by throwing a punch."**

In this situation, we can move first to block the likely enemy move at East Farm, in which case we would at best blunt his attack frontally but would not likely destroy the enemy force. Or, from our interior position at Hamlet, we can let the enemy make the first move on East Farm and crush him in the flank when he does. We might want to put a small holding force at East Farm, not to block the enemy move but to control it, to act as a trigger mechanism for our flank attack and "grab him by the nose," as Patton would say, while we "kick him in the pants." It is a variation of the fix-and-flank in which, instead of our having to move around the enemy to get at his flank, we let him move past us to accomplish the same end.

We don't have to gamble everything on the enemy taking the East Farm road either. We can do the same thing at West Farm if the enemy goes west. By letting the enemy move first, because we are ready for him, we get him to expose himself, and we can create the opportunity for a decisive victory.

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# Enemy Over the Bridge, Continued: A Thwarted Plan

*"However absorbed a commander may be in the elaboration of his own thoughts, it is sometimes necessary to take the enemy into account."*

*—Winston Churchill*

*"Positions are seldom lost because they have been destroyed, but almost invariably because the leader has decided in his own mind that the position cannot be held."*

*—Gen A. A. Vandegrift*

**Opposing Wills**

Perhaps the most important thing this scenario does is illustrate the fundamental nature of war as a conflict between hostile, independent wills. The enemy is not an inanimate object but an independent and animate force that acts and reacts. His commanders may be clever and bold; his troops may be aggressive and well trained; he may recognize every bit as much as we do the importance of principles like initiative, speed, surprise, and main effort. (Because they depict a situation frozen in time, TDGs don't usually capture this idea of an animate, active enemy very well.)

We should not expect the enemy to sit still while we execute our plans—to die meekly in place like aggressors in a scripted field exercise. The enemy will have an object and intent of his own, and we must expect that while we are trying to impose our will on him, he is trying to do the same with us.

It's precisely for this reason that things will rarely go as planned. Despite the fact that our battalion commander in this scenario has made the "right" decision and come up with a reasonable plan, the battle is going badly. It's possible to do everything right and still take a beating. We must recognize this, accept it as part of the nature of war, and have the perseverance to keep going.

**Perseverance**

This book is primarily about fighting smarter and about outsmarting and outfoxing the enemy. Fighting smarter means fighting more economically—i.e., accomplishing the mission at the minimum cost in lives and equipment lost. But there's much more than this to success. Since combat is a clash of hostile wills, willpower is an essential element. Perseverance, tenacity, steadfastness, resoluteness, and fighting spirit are at least as important as superior intelligence. When all else is said and done, as Gen Vandegrift's quote shows, it sometimes comes down to who's tougher and willing to persevere. Maj Leonard A. Blasiol's solution to this problem when it first appeared provides a good example of perseverance in the face of a deteriorating situation:

> This is a fluid, uncertain situation, and the upper hand will go to the commander who acts with the most daring and resolution. . . . Our bold plan will ensure that we keep the enemy reacting to us, rather than the other way around. As long as we can retain the initiative south of the river, the division can attack as scheduled, and the 2d Battalion, 6th Marines will have accomplished its mission.

**What's the Enemy Up To?**

Since the original scenario described in "Enemy Over the Bridge," has the enemy situation gotten any clearer? We now know that the enemy has a pretty sizable force south of the river—certainly larger than we were earlier led to believe. In addition to the estimated company in the assembly area, the enemy also has a large enough force at East Farm to smash half our battalion or at least to stop it and cause extensive confusion with his night ambush. Moreover, the enemy

has been south of the river long enough to prepare the ambush at East Farm. More and more, this has the appearance of a serious enemy initiative rather than just a probe. We don't actually know the situation on the west side, but it's reasonable to figure that if the enemy has sent out a force to protect one flank, he has likely done the same for the other. We can't ignore the distinct possibility that this situation represents a serious effort by the enemy to establish a bridgehead south of

**“We should not expect the enemy to sit still while we execute our plans—to die meekly in place . . . ”**

the river, which would, of course, seriously disrupt our division's plans.

**Options**

So where does this leave us?

• *Option 1: Hunker down and hold what we've got.* As Mr. C. Craig Smith explained in his solution:

> We have already sent in our Sunday punch, and the punchee has turned out to be an ogre. Now our primary objective is damage control until Big Brother comes to the rescue.
>
> The regiment will be moving up in a matter of hours. Moving forward before that time will do us more harm than good. We would not only be walking into a fire sack, we would be leaving the roads to the south uncovered. . . .
>
> At night in an unreconnoitered area, with tired troops and possibly heavy casualties, it is best to pull back to the strongest available defensive positions, reinforce, and move up later as part of a regimental counterattack.

According to this option, we've already taken too much of a beating to contemplate further offensive action. We should cut our losses rather than risk losing everything by further initiatives. We surrender the initiative to the enemy and hope that reinforcements arrive in time. By holding the two hills we can prevent the enemy from consolidating his bridgehead or breaking out to the south. We also secure terrain that division can use to launch an attack to recapture the bridge. As for Companies E and A, at this stage there is little we can do.

• *Option 2: Rescue the mobile force at East Farm.* We certainly don't want to send our remaining combat power directly into the ambush that has hammered the rest of battalion. If we are intent on going to go to the rescue of the mobile force we should consider trying to take the enemy ambush in flank—perhaps with Company G crossing the Hamlet-East Farm road and approaching the ambush site through the woods from the west. There are several problems here, though. First, a move like this would be very vulnerable to an enemy stroke from the direction of Hamlet. Second, being foot-mobile, would we arrive in time to do any good? And third, trying to find what's left of the mobile force in the dark would be a coordination nightmare fraught with dangers.

But more important, regardless of the difficulties, is going to East Farm the right thing to do? It's natural to want to go to the aid of our comrades, but are there more important things we should be doing with our remaining combat power? Mr. Carl F. Kusch thought so, as he explained in his solution:

> That portion of our battalion that was "engaged" with the enemy in the vicinity of the East Farm was the bulk of the battalion (especially in terms of combat power) and was therefore a sizable force in its own right. Any enemy unit that could have tied up our forces there would have been no mere passing recon patrol. There would be absolutely *nothing* whatsoever that the remainder of the battalion could do *directly* to help our comrades out of their jam. As hard as it may have been, the cold reality of the situation was that it would be the *wrong* decision to "speed" off toward the East Farm, attempting to reinforce our beleaguered forces in that area.

As a rule, we should look to reinforce success and not failure. Even if we're able to rescue part of the mobile force, resuming the attack along the original axis is not a good option. In general it's not a good idea to resume an attack in a direction that's already failed, even with more forces; it's usually better to try a different approach.

Most readers recognized that going to East Farm was not a good idea. First, at this stage there is little we could accomplish. Second, and more important, we would be playing directly into the enemy's hands; he will have distracted our efforts completely away from the bridge, the truly critical point for both sides in this situaition.

• *Option 3: Seize Hamlet.* This was the original mission of the two companies under our control (as battalion executive officer). The object of our attack was clearly a supporting one—to protect the main attack's left flank as it moved toward East Farm and to distract the enemy. To continue to attack Hamlet when the main attack that we're supporting has failed would be a meaningless mistake. But several readers suggested attacking Hamlet anyway, although for different reasons and always in conjunction with their own attack on the bridge. In that this decision was not the result of blindly following orders and reflected an appreciation of the larger developing situation and the battalion commander's intent, there may be some merit in it.

As we saw in the last scenario, Hamlet is more important to the enemy than to us. Perhaps Hamlet is worth taking precisely because it is so valuable to the enemy. By controlling Hamlet we would deny the enemy the use of interior lines that gives him such flexibility. By striking Hamlet we would not be directly improving our own position so much as weakening the enemy's—trying to lessen the initiative and freedom of action that so clearly belongs to him. And because Hamlet is valuable to the enemy, striking at it would definitely grab his attention, possibly getting him to react to us instead of vice versa. In effect, we would be launching a sort of spoiling attack to hamstring the enemy until our reinforcements arrive. Moreover, as Capt

**“The important things are to be willing and able to shift quickly when we have found a gap and not to beat our head against the wall when we've run up against a surface. ”**

Gregory D. Stevens explained, an attack on Hamlet with one company could distract the enemy while we make a move on the bridge with the other.

• *Option 4: Go for the bridge.* It's very likely that the division attack at 0400 tomorrow will have to be scuttled. It's certain that if the attack does go as scheduled, our battalion won't be leading it. But that doesn't lessen the importance of the bridge. We want to do whatever we can to keep the option

of attack open. And as we've already discussed, as long as the enemy holds the bridge our division's situation continues to deteriorate. 1stLt Eric M. Veit's estimate of the situation in his solution was on the money:

> Seizure and control of the bridge was the battalion commander's intent and remains the key issue even though his mobile force has been ambushed. I must fight off the natural reaction to come to their aid. If I did so, I may be only wasting my Marines in a hopeless situation, while failing to prevent more enemy forces from moving south across the bridge. Instead, I concentrate on seizing control of the bridge, and alert higher headquarters of my intentions.

Although the two companies under our control were given another mission, the focus of efforts was, and remains, the bridge. The battalion commander may actually be retrieving the situation at East Farm and continuing his attack. But our best estimate is that the main attack has failed, and based on that we should immediately go after the bridge ourselves.

### Surfaces and Gaps Again—An Infiltration Attack

This scenario provides another good illustration of the concept of surfaces and gaps. In the original scenario we knew that the assembly area was a surface; we ran head-on into an enemy infantry unit in the woods. We thought that the East Farm road might be a gap, which we tried to exploit with our motorized and tank units. But we learned the hard way that East Farm constitutes another surface. This brings up a couple of valuable points. The first is the importance of judgment. A clever enemy may try to disguise a surface as a gap by luring us into an ambush in the form of a fire sack. So how do we know the difference between a gap and a fire sack? There is no easy answer; it's a function of good intelligence, reconnaissance, knowing our enemy, and sound judgment. The second point, which we've made repeatedly, is that no situation is certain. Locating gaps is, to a certain extent, a process of trial and error—probing until we find a weak spot. The important things are to be willing and able to shift quickly when we have found a gap and not to beat our head against the wall when we've run up against a surface.

We don't know the situation to the west, but it's not unlikely that the enemy also has forces at West Farm. Since the enemy has been moving vehicles south across the bridge, it's a good bet that the road between the bridge and Hamlet is clogged with vehicles and that Hamlet has probably been occupied.

Where does this leave us? We have a known surface to the east at East Farm. We have another known surface in the assembly area/Hamlet section. We have an unknown situation in the west, but would not be surprised if the enemy has a force at West Farm. The enemy seems to control the roads and road intersections; we have attacked with our vehicular elements by way of the roads and been ambushed. All we have left are our two foot infantry companies—Company F south of the assembly area and Company G near east hill. Our foot infantry companies are best suited to operating away from the roads, where the wooded terrain offers security and concealment. So if we're going to go after the bridge, the best bet at this stage seems to be to move through the woods between the strong enemy positions. The enemy occupies the wooded area between Hamlet and West Farm, which leaves us the area between Hamlet and East Farm. Company G is in the best position to use this axis. A simultaneous supporting attack on Hamlet by Company F would distract the enemy and protect Company G's left flank as it moves to the east around Hamlet. USMC

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# Battle of the Garagiola River

*"Thus, those skilled at making the enemy move do so by creating a situation to which he must conform; they entice him with something he is certain to take, and with lures of ostensible profit they await him in ambush."*

*—Sun Tzu*

*"The withdrawal should be thought of as an offensive instrument, and exercises be framed to teach how the enemy can be lured into a trap, closed by counterstroke or devastating circle of fire."*

*—B. H. Liddell Hart*

**Two Approaches**

This scenario suggests two fundamentally different types of solutions, with two drastically different intended results. Based on the latitude our higher commander has given us, we could argue that either, if successful, accomplishes the mission.

• *Positional Defense.* This is the conventional and modest—some might argue prudent—approach, by which we intend to delay the enemy advance. This approach recognizes the enemy's superior numbers. It involves establishing strong defensive positions along the key terrain, creating a defensive barrier by which we intend to hold up the enemy's advance. This approach uses the river as an obstacle to increase our own combat power. We may even consider demolishing the bridges if we can get permission. We intend to keep the enemy on the far side as long as possible and make it as costly as possible for him to get across. From our defensive positions we would absorb the enemy's attack frontally and blunt his advance, but we would not destroy him. Our reserves would counterattack to eject enemy penetrations and restore threatened areas. By this approach we would be surrendering the initiative to the enemy and would have to expect that eventually he will force his way through or around us. This approach therefore accepts that eventually the enemy will get across the river to continue the advance—our intent is to exact the greatest possible cost in time and resources lost.

• *Mobile Defense/Counterstroke.* This is a much bolder and more ambitious approach—some would say rash—in which the intent is not merely to delay and wear down the enemy, but to destroy him altogether. It means attacking a regiment with a battalion. By this approach, minimal fixing forces to the enemy's front would fall back under pressure, coaxing the enemy into committing himself to the southern bridges and drawing the leading enemy elements across. Meanwhile, the bulk of our force, including all our tanks, would outflank the enemy via the Cujo bridge and attack the enemy in the flank from the north. This approach ignores the natural defensive qualities that the river offers. We would still use the river as an obstacle, not to halt the enemy but, by letting his leading elements across, to split his forces. As Sun Tzu said: "When an advancing enemy crosses water do not meet him at the water's edge. It is advantageous to allow half his force to cross and then strike." This plan has an inherent risk; for by seeking outright victory with a decisive battle, we also risk outright defeat.

> **"The first ingredient in achieving a decisive victory is having the courage to try for one. You don't win great victories by trying for modest ones."**

**A Sample FragO**

The first approach is fairly straightforward; the second is less conventional and worth discussing. Therefore, the following is a sample fragmentary order for the latter course of action:

> Gentlemen, just as we'd hoped, the enemy is walking into our trap, and we will implement the plan as we've previously discussed. You all remember Hannibal and the battle of Lake Trasimene that we studied at officers' call last month. Well, we're going to reenact it today. We will grab our enemy by the nose, lead him across the river, and while he's got one foot on either bank, just when he thinks he is about to break through, we will crush him in the flank.

I intend to draw the enemy across the river with two companies and crush him with a flanking attack from the north, supported by concentrated artillery and close air support. The initial focus of efforts is fixing the enemy in the killing zone, shifting to the flank attack as it commences.

LAR Company: Delay the enemy along the line Tragedia-Androida. India Company: Delay along the coast road from as far forward as possible to a comanding position on the heights east of the river. Both of you: Hurt him, but not so badly that he tries any flanking maneuvers; I want you to keep him oriented eastward. You've got to hold him for at least 90 minutes.

XO: Take Tanks, Kilo, and Lima across the Cujo bridge and prepare for a coordinated attack on order generally south along the line Cujo-Tragedia. The attack must be ready to kick off in no more than 90 minutes; the sooner you're ready, the better. Form a tank-infantry company in reserve. I'll let you know whether to commit it or not; it should be ready to attack along the lines Cujo-Tragedia or Cujo-Androida.

Fire Support Coordinator: As we discussed, plan to mass fires on-call in the vicinity of Tragedia, Androida, and the Tragedia and Garagiola bridges.

Air: A couple of sorties is not enough. Over the next couple of hours we are going to be destroying one enemy mechanized regiment. I need everything that flies. I intend to mass all supporting arms in conjunction with the flanking attack.

**“. . . we want to avoid being predictable. By establishing patterns we set ourselves up to be ambushed. Instead, we want to be unpredictable, to change our tactics, to avoid discernible patterns.”**

To the regimental commander:

As we discussed, Colonel, we have a chance to deal the enemy a crushing blow; he is walking into our trap. I'm implementing the plan we discussed and will have to commit to a decisive battle. I need more than my fair share of support, especially air. And that tank-infantry battalion you've got in reserve sure would help.

(The reason for the “on-order” attack in this order is because the timing of the *ch'i* depends on the progress the enemy makes against our *cheng*.) Unquestionably, this approach offers a much bigger payoff and also involves a bigger risk. Why should we think it will work?

**Boldness**

The first thing this plan has going for it is its very boldness, which, as we've already discussed, is a force multiplier. Rommel said: “Bold decisions give the best promise of success.” Certainly Hannibal's victory at Lake Trasimene was bold in the extreme. Had Hannibal's plan not worked, we wouldn't consider it bold, it would be reckless. It takes moral courage to adopt a bold plan, and for that reason the enemy often does not expect it.

The first ingredient in achieving a decisive victory is having the courage to try for one. You don't win great victories by trying for modest ones—unless your enemy is completely incompetent, in which case it probably doesn't matter what you do, and you've got little to lose by going for a knockout. If Hannibal had adopted a more “prudent” and “reasonable” plan on that April morning, we wouldn't study Lake Trasimene today as an example of tactical genius.

This does not mean that we should swing for the fences every time up. The conditions must be right—the mission, the terrain, the enemy situation, the capabilities of our own forces. Sometimes, for example, the intent is not to gain a decisive battle, but to forestall one—to buy time so the higher commander can attempt something somewhere else. In that case, all other things being equal, it would be a disservice to the higher commander to risk a decisive defeat by trying for a decisive victory when no such victory was needed. But what it does mean is that we shouldn't pass up the opportunity when it's there.

**Predictability**

The next thing we have going for us in this situation is a predictable enemy. We and our enemy have established a little pattern over the last couple of weeks, in which he has demonstrated aggressive, head-strong tendencies. Knowing this, we can take advantage of these tendencies by anticipating what our enemy will do and be waiting for him when he does. As we've already mentioned, it's not a good idea to gamble everything on the enemy's doing what we expect. We should be ready to exploit the situation if he does, but we should also be prepared to deal with the situation if he doesn't.

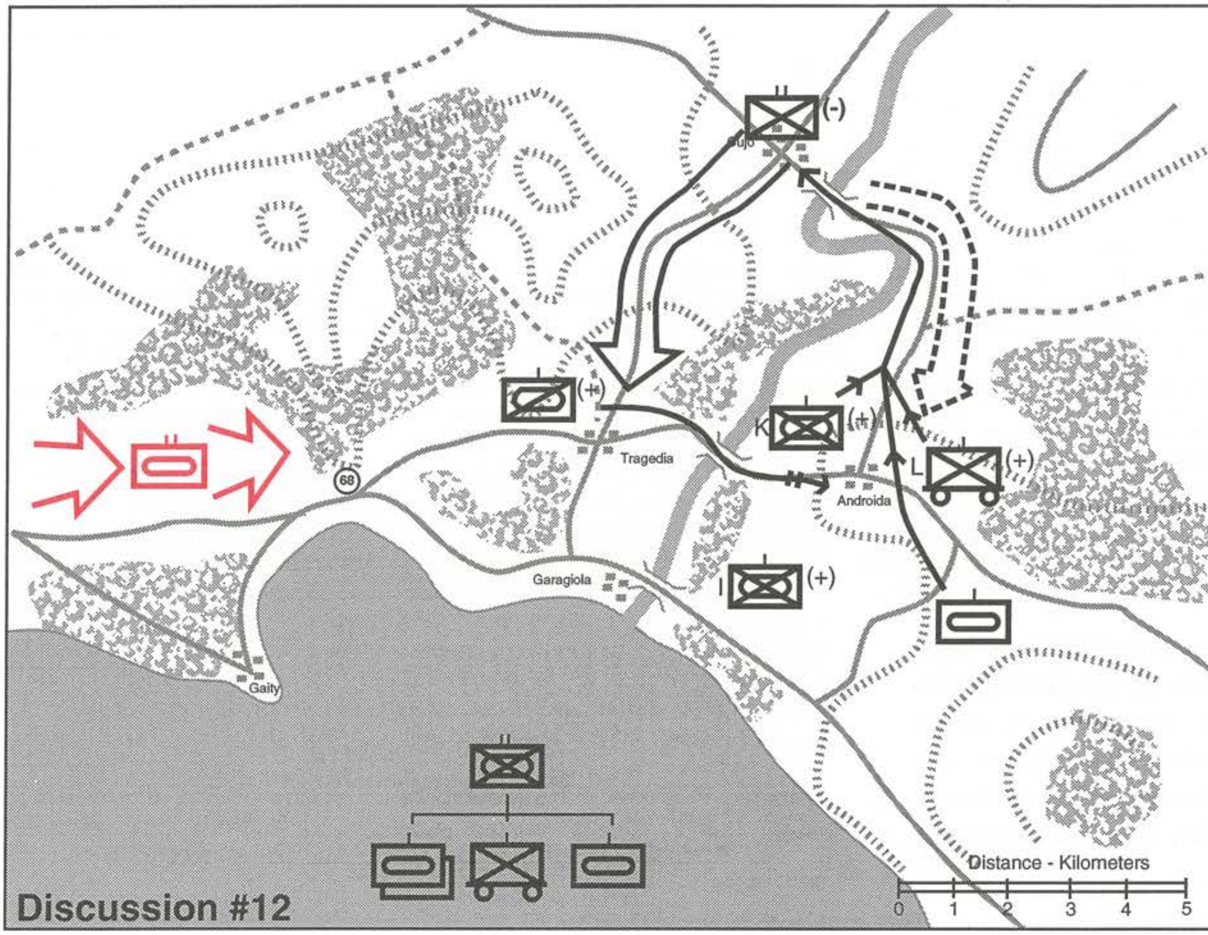
For our part what this means is that we want to avoid being predictable. By establishing patterns we set ourselves up to be ambushed. Instead, we want to be unpredictable, to change our tactics, to avoid discernible patterns. Not only will it be harder for the enemy to surprise us, but it will be easier for us to achieve surprise, since our enemy won't know what to expect from us. In this scenario, since we've already established a certain pattern and the enemy has developed some idea of what to expect from us, our element of surprise could be even greater; we've set him up for a fall.

**Preparation**

Another advantage we have in this situation is the opportunity to prepare for the battle. As Maj Michael P. Marletto has pointed out in “The View From the Other Side: A Conversation With the Hero of the Garagiola River” (*MCG*, Jan93), if we've waited until 30 minutes before the enemy arrives to even begin thinking about the upcoming battle, we're in trouble. The fact is our battalion commander should have been analyzing the situation as it developed over the last 2 weeks, developing possible courses of action and contingencies, issuing warning orders, making defensive preparations and refining his plans.

**“. . . it's difficult to overestimate the importance of avoiding the enemy's front and striking his flanks. . . . those areas where the enemy's attention isn't directed.”**

We have been falling back in the face of enemy pressure for the last 2 weeks, buying time. We should make use of that time by “shaping” the battlefield, i.e., thinking in advance of how we want things to unfold and how we hope to achieve an advantage. We could reasonably anticipate falling back across the Garagiola River and could recognize that the terrain there offered the opportunity for a counterstroke. We had the advantage of being able to choose the battlefield, and because it was behind us, we could prepare it while the enemy could not. All




the while we were preparing the battlefield for the upcoming battle, we would be falling back in such a way as to draw the enemy into the trap. If we succeeded in getting the enemy to fall into the trap as we'd designed it, we'd spring our ambush; if not, we'd continue to fall back until we could create another opportunity.

Preparations would include fire support planning to provide for the coordination and massing of air and ground fires; operations by combat engineers to prepare defensive works, obstacles, and minefields to canalize and temporarily halt enemy forces to make them vulnerable to our fires; coordinating the barrier plan with the fire plan; and selecting withdrawal routes for our fixing forces and directions of attack for our flanking forces. If time permitted, they would even include a rehearsal (at least with key leaders) to get the timing and coordination down.

As Maj Marletto pointed out, time is a precious commodity shared by both sides. We have to make the most of every second.

**Flanks**

The final advantage we have in this situation is the opportunity, if things go reasonably well, of striking the enemy's left flank. Nearly all of the discussions of the previous scenarios have involved some effort to get at the enemy's flank, but we have never treated the subject explicitly. We should, because fix-and-flank has been a central theme of this book. Simple as it sounds, it's difficult to overestimate the importance of avoiding the enemy's front and striking his flanks.

The enemy's front is that direction in which his units and weapons are facing and that direction in which his attention is focused. Strictly speaking, the flanks are to the sides and the rear to the back, but it's easier simply to think of them as those areas where the enemy's attention isn't directed. Truly decisive effects come from attacking the enemy in flank or rear, because by attacking in that way we save ourselves by avoiding the enemy's strength while at the same time striking him where he is vulnerable. A flanking attack or envelopment has the added psychological effect of threatening the enemy's lines of communication. Conversely, by striking the enemy frontally we may batter him, but unless we have overwhelming superiority we're not likely to destroy him. In the process, because we're striking directly into the enemy's strength, we'll pay a cost.

We have discussed previously the need for a fixing force to complement our flanking force. Unless there is a fixing force to distract his attention to the front, an enemy force like a man will turn to face a threat to its flank.

It's been argued that in order to get into a position to threaten an enemy's flank or lines of communication we must often expose our own, and so there is risk inherent in any flanking maneuver. In theory this may be true, but the danger rarely exists equally in practice. If we have successfully and truly seized the initiative, we need seldom fear having our flank attacked. The enemy is too busy reacting to us and fearing for his own flank. In that case the best flank protection is bold and aggressive action.

If flanks are truly as important as history suggests, why is it that defenders continue to defend to the front and attackers continue to attack the enemy frontally and that the rare flanking attack continues to remain decisive? A couple of reasons. First, although logic may tell us to beware our flanks, milita-

ry units like human beings are naturally oriented forwards. In order to operate effectively to the sides or rear, they must turn to face that direction. Even though a commander's judgment may tell him to look for an attack against his flank, the activity to his front will naturally catch his attention. And second, the force of friction tends to reduce combat to the simplest terms, making even the simplest actions difficult. Compared to a frontal attack, even a simple single envelopment becomes difficult to execute. It's one thing to draw a flanking maneuver on a TDG map; it's another thing altogether to execute that maneuver in the field. But it's precisely because a flank attack is more difficult to execute that it is less expected and therefore more effective when pulled off.

**When Is a Gap Not a Gap?**

Answer: When it's a surface. Our position along the Garagiola River is a surface intended to look like a gap. We want the enemy to think he can get through; otherwise he's less likely to enter the trap we've laid. At this stage he is probably most concerned about seizing a bridgehead across the river. So, as Sun Tzu's quote suggests, we offer the possibility of seizing the bridges intact as bait. We have a fixing force to the enemy's front; but the intent is not to block the enemy's advance, but rather to control it. Our fixing force should lead the enemy by the nose right into our killing zone.

**Ambush Mentality**

The operation we've been talking about amounts to an ambush on a large scale. It requires us to think of the defense in different terms than we usually do. A traditional defense is thought of as a wall across our front designed to keep the enemy out. As we've said, that approach may blunt the enemy's advance but is unlikely to destroy him. It means meeting him frontally and absorbing casualties in the process. Carried to its logical extreme, it results in an indecisive stalemate with two halted opponents facing each other frontally, as on the Western Front in World War I. The ambush mentality, on the other hand, thinks of the defense as a trap. Instead of trying to keep the enemy out, we try to lure him in. Remember, an ambush isn't interested in preserving terrain; it is interested in destroying that enemy unit that passes through the killing zone. Instead of positioning ourselves *perpendicular* to his direction of attack to block his advance, we position ourselves *parallel* so to ambush him in the flank as he passes.

**"A traditional defense is thought of as a wall across our front designed to keep the enemy out. . . . The ambush mentality, on the other hand, thinks of the defense as a trap. Instead of trying to keep the enemy out, we try to lure him in."**

Surprise is central to the ambush mentality. Typically we think of surprise as belonging to the attacker, but the defender can achieve it by concealing his presence, making his surfaces look like gaps, and pouncing when the unsuspecting enemy enters the trap.

**Historically**

Interestingly, the battalion commander used an historical example to describe his commander's intent, not because he expected this battle to be an exact replica (since no two battles are alike), but because the example of Lake Trasimene provided a clear and vivid description of the end result that he expected. (Fortunately, Lake Trasimene was familiar enough to his subordinates that the example was meaningful.) The battle of Lake Trasimene was one of Hannibal's masterpieces, in which the Carthaginian routed a superior Roman force under the headstrong Flaminius in 217 B.C. Flaminius' legions stood between Hannibal and Rome. Rather than attack his enemy on strong defensive terrain of the Roman's choosing, Hannibal marched his army through the Appenine mountains around Flaminius' left flank and threatened the Roman lines of communications, forcing Flaminius to come to him. With a small force operating to the Romans' front, Hannibal lured the enemy into an enclosed basin with the lake to the south and high ground to the north. His main body, hidden in the hills to the north, ambushed the Romans in the flank. The battle became a rout.

Our well-read battalion commander has failed to mention that this situation probably equally resembles Hannibal's earlier victory at the River Trebia, in which he was able to draw the Romans across the river and strike their flank before they we able to consolidate. He did not use the river as a barrier to halt the Roman advance, but as a means for disrupting the enemy movement and leaving them vulnerable. In both cases, Hannibal demonstrated the characteristic ability to get his enemy to come to him on his terms. Even though he let the enemy make the first move—or, more accurately perhaps, lured the enemy into making the first move—he retained the initiative. USMC

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# Battle of the Garagiola River Revisited

*"How can any man say what he should do himself if he is ignorant what his adversary is about?"*

*—Baron Antoine Jomini*

*"It is an accepted maxim of war, never to do what the enemy wishes you to do, for this reason alone, that he desires it; avoid a battlefield he has reconnoitered and studied and, with even more reason, ground that he has fortified and where he is entrenched."*

*—Napoleon Bonaparte*

**Know Your Enemy**

As with Scenario #10, "Gap at the Bridge," this scenario is designed to illustrate the importance of trying to figure out what your enemy is up to and to use that insight to your advantage. The ability to anticipate the enemy's likely moves can be a decisive advantage. The ability to anticipate is based on the ability to see a situation through the enemy's eyes. How does knowing how you solved this scenario from the other side influence your actions?

**What's the Enemy Up To?**

Despite the fact that we have been in continuous contact with the enemy for the last 2 weeks, we have surprisingly little specific intelligence about the current situation. Once again the "fog" of war has descended (literally, in this scenario) to drive home the important point that incomplete information is a defining feature of tactical decisionmaking and something we have to learn to live with.

What do we know for certain? We know that the enemy has been falling back continuously for the last 2 weeks, and therefore seems content to trade space for time while gradually wearing us down. For the present at least, he seems intent on not becoming decisively engaged. What little current information we have of enemy dispositions indicates he intends to defend the riverline. As discussed in the previous scenario, this would be the obvious and logical course of action. We have no information about the situation at the Cujo bridge, but we can assume the enemy has some forces there. The question is how many?

The armored activity near Androida could be his reserve—again, fairly predictable and consistent with a defense of the riverline. The centrally located Androida is key for several reasons. First, from that position the enemy has good observation of nearly the entire battlefield. Second, Androida and the connected high ground which curves south to the shore dominate both southern bridges. Third, Androida also blocks the main route from the Cujo bridge. And finally, if the enemy wants to shift forces laterally from one bridge to another, Androida is the central hub through which those forces must pass. Clearly, no matter what course of action we choose, at a minimum we should target Androida with supporting arms to obscure the enemy's observation and disrupt his lateral shifting of forces.

**❝ The ability to anticipate the enemy's likely moves can be a decisive advantage. The ability to anticipate is based on the ability to see a situation through the enemy's eyes. ❞**

Everything we know of the enemy situation to this point leads us to conclude that the enemy will make a defensive stand along the river. This should be a matter of serious concern to us because, based on what we know of the last scenario, it's exactly what a bold enemy commander would want us to conclude if he were actually going to spring an ambush. (I think it makes the counterstroke/ambush solution to the last scenario even more appealing in retrospect.)

Regardless of our estimate of the enemy situation, the terrain ought to set off warning bells. We ought to recognize, as Hannibal did at Lake Trasimene, that the area immediately east of Checkpoint 68 is a tailor-made killing zone: a low area devoid of much cover and concealment, penned in and dominated by high ground on three sides and by water on the fourth.

Even if we're convinced that the en-

emy lacks the strength, or time, or nerve to launch a counterstroke/ambush from the north, we would be foolish to move our entire force into the basin without taking some measure to secure our left flank—even though the prospect of seizing the bridges intact might beckon us into a headlong rush. Flaminius did exactly that and suffered ignominious defeat.

**Hasty Versus Deliberate Crossing**

Given the choice, we would prefer to make a hasty crossing—launching directly into the crossing without loss of momentum, hopefully seizing one or more bridges intact and preventing

> **“ The object would be to keep up the speed of the offensive and to strike before the enemy could further strengthen his defenses. But the enemy has a say in the matter. ”**

the enemy from disengaging again. The object would be to keep up the speed of the offensive and to strike before the enemy could further strengthen his defenses. But the enemy has a say in the matter. If he has made solid preparations, a hasty crossing may not be an option, and we will have no choice but to plan a deliberate crossing, a complex operation based on thorough planning and preparation. If that's the case the enemy will probably have the option of withdrawing on his own terms, and we will probably have to wait until later to get our decisive battle.

**Where To Attack**

We want to strike in more than one place, so that we have multiple options, with the flexibility to reinforce whichever action shows the most promise. If one crossing fails, we would still have another possibility. In other words, we don't want to put all our eggs in one basket. We could attack in the vicinity of all three bridges, which would give us the greatest number of possible options. However, this would disperse us across the greatest frontage, making it difficult to concentrate quickly at any one spot, and would leave us less in reserve to exploit whichever attack shows promise. Ideally, we want to design a *cheng/ch'i* move which catches the enemy between two mutually supporting attacks.

Numerous readers recognized the advantages of attacking the Cujo bridge. First, it avoids the natural killing zone. Second, it offers the opportunity of taking the main enemy positions in the flank. Third, the Cujo bridge is somewhat isolated from the other two and beyond the range of mutual support. And fourth, moving a unit along the trail north of the ridge to the Cujo road—in addition to being the only move which is masked from enemy observation from Androida—will protect our left flank against an enemy attack from that direction. In fact, it may allow us to take the enemy's flanking attack in the flank or rear.

In conjunction with an attack on the Cujo bridge, an attack at the Tragedia vice the Garagiola bridge makes more sense. First, being closer to the Cujo bridge makes it easier for our two wings to reinforce and complement each other. Second, an attack directly toward Androida threatens to crack open the enemy position in general and to cut off enemy forces defending the Cujo bridge in particular. And third, an attack at Garagiola fixes only the far left of the enemy's front, leaving his center free to reinforce his right at Cujo. An attack near Tragedia, on the other hand, is more likely to prevent both the enemy's center and left from reinforcing Cujo.

The Garagiola bridge offers the fewest advantages. An attack across the river at Garagiola would not directly threaten the enemy's lines of communication or the forces defending the other bridges. And even after we'd forced a crossing we would still be in a precarious position, surrounded by dominating terrain.

In explanation of his solution, Capt David C. Fuquea wrote:

> I know we can keep the enemy busy enough to allow [the main effort] to get across the river [at Cujo]. I'm not foolish enough to think Cujo will be undefended. I am sure that with speed, firepower from the CIFS [close-in fire support], and a little luck we can punch through Cujo and roll up the enemy flank before they get out of the box we build around them with fire support, FASCAM [field artillery scatterable mines], and the supporting attack.

**The Amphibious Option?**

Several readers suggested using our AAVs to turn the enemy's southern flank by making a landing on the shore southeast of Garagiola (usually launching the envelopment from Gaiety). Strictly speaking, this does not constitute an amphibious landing—by definition an attack from ship to shore—but rather a shore-to-shore operation. Regardless, the idea behind it is to use our ability to move on the water as a means to avoid the enemy's front and get at his flank.

The shore-to-shore option introduces new variables to the problem. What is the military situation on the lake? Does the enemy have combat craft? Are there any suitable landing beaches for our AAVs? Has the enemy planted obstacles or mines in the surf? Presumably, we would know the answers to these questions, or could find out. Let's assume that somewhere in the 4 or 5 kilometers of flatland east of the river mouth there are suitable landing beaches but that further southeast there are not; the high ground appears to descend directly to the waterline.

One of the great advantages of amphibious operations is the strategic and operational mobility of movement by sea. Generally, we can move large numbers of men and equipment over great distances faster by sea than by land. But the same mobility advantage does not generally hold at the tactical level, in which the distances are shorter. Our AAVs would be visible to

> **“ We want to strike in more than one place, so that we have multiple options, with the flexibility to reinforce whichever action shows the most promise. ”**

the enemy during the entire move, moving slowly through the water, on exterior lines. Meanwhile, the enemy, motorized and using interior lines, would simply have to face left to meet the threat (and would have plenty of time to do so). To have any chance of success, we would have to conduct such a landing as part of a fix-and-flank move, in conjunction with a frontal attack against the river to occupy the enemy's attention.

But even if we were to succeed in making the landing in the area directly southeast of the river, the envelopment wouldn't be deep enough to pose

much of a threat to the enemy position. We would still be in front of the commanding terrain at Androida and the Androida heights. As with an attack across the Garagiola bridge, we wouldn't directly threaten the enemy's lines of communication. Trying to sell the idea of an amphibious landing at Inchon to the Joint Chiefs in 1950, Gen Douglas MacArthur argued:

> The deep envelopment based on surprise, which severs the enemy's supply lines, is and always has been the most decisive maneuver of war. A short envelopment which fails to envelop and leaves the enemy's supply system intact, merely divides your forces and can lead to heavy loss and even jeopardy.

So while the shore-to-shore option gets points for originality, in this particular case it's a marginal option.

**Concentration**

Liddell Hart wrote that, "The principles of war could, for brevity, be condensed into a single word—'Concentration.' " Likewise *FMFM 1* says:

> Concentration is the convergence of effort in time and space. It is the means by which we develop superiority at the decisive time and place. Concentration does not apply only to combat forces. It applies equally to all available resources: fires, aviation, the intelligence effort, logistics, and all other forms of combat support and combat service support. . . .
>
> Effective concentration may achieve decisive local superiority for a numerically inferior force. The willingness to concentrate at the decisive place and time necessitates strict economy and acceptance of risk elsewhere and at other times. To devote means to unnecessary efforts or excessive means to necessary secondary efforts violates the principle of concentration and is counterproductive to the true objective.
>
> Since war is fluid and opportunities fleeting, concentration applies to time as well as space. We must concentrate not only at the decisive location, but also at the decisive moment.

That's what the concept of the main effort is all about—focusing the maximum possible force at the decisive time and place. The aim is not marginal superiority at the critical point, or even modest superiority, but overwhelming superiority. We're not interested in fair fights, but in routs if we can get them.

How do we gain local superiority when the odds are roughly equal or when we're outnumbered? As Liddell Hart also pointed out, concentration is the product of dispersion. By keeping dispersed until the last moment, we keep the enemy guessing as to where we will strike and thus keep him dispersed. We operate in ways that give us multiple options, so the enemy can't concentrate against us. We use speed and surprise so the enemy can't react in time. We concentrate quickly at the critical point while at the same time using supporting attacks, supporting arms, and other means to prevent the enemy from concentrating.

It's a challenge to gain local superiority when we're outnumbered. It's much easier when we've got overall superiority, such as in this case. Even discounting the battalion that the enemy has recently battered, regiment still has another infantry battalion and a tank battalion available. As Mr. C. Craig Smith argued in his solution, "We must use them in concert, not in serial sequence. We can create the proverbial horns of a dilemma by attacking strongly in two widely separated places at once."

His solution to this problem was to request that higher headquarters use another battalion to attack the southern bridges while we concentrate our entire battalion against the Cujo bridge—which would still leave regiment one healthy and one battered battalion with which to exploit.

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# Battle of the Dadmamian Swamp

*"The unquestionable advantages of the interior lines of operations are valid only as long as you retain enough space to advance against one enemy . . . gaining time to beat and pursue him, and then to turn against the other. . . . If this space, however, is narrowed down to the extent that you cannot attack one enemy without running the risk of meeting the other who attacks you from the flank or rear, then the strategic advantage of interior lines turns into the tactical disadvantage of encirclement."*

*—Helmuth von Moltke*

*"For great aims we must dare great things."*

*—Carl von Clausewitz*

**Concentration**

This scenario is similar to "Gap at the Bridge" in that both require us to hold a bridgehead against enemy pressure until friendly reinforcements can arrive. As with "Gap at the Bridge," the overall mission is a defensive one, but the means of accomplishing it can be offensive or defensive. We can hunker down and try to hold out until help arrives, or we can strike out at the enemy to seize the initiative and keep him off balance. Unlike in "Gap at the Bridge," in which the enemy situation was extremely uncertain, in this case we can be fairly certain that the enemy is converging on us with two separate forces, each of which is roughly equal to our own, and threatens to catch us in a pincer.

The fundamental question in this scenario is thus one of concentration. How do we keep the enemy from achieving it? Most readers recognized immediately that we must prevent the junction or cooperation of the two enemy regiments. Fighting each separately, the odds are roughly even; fighting both together, we are outnumbered two to one.

But the problem is not simply one of preventing the enemy from concentrating against us. After we have accomplished that we still have the problem of focusing every available ounce of our own combat power against one enemy regiment while using the minimum force necessary to hold off the other. What is the smallest unit we can use to occupy either enemy regiment? A battalion? Less?

**We Must Strike First**

The previous discussion should make it clear that in this scenario we can't afford to go on the defensive and hunker down. We can't wait for the enemy to converge on us. By doing that we will surrender the initiative to the enemy and will guarantee that sooner or later we will become the victims of a major converging attack, finding ourselves under pressure from two directions at once.

We must strike before the enemy regiments can converge on us, with the intent of destroying each in turn—or at a minimum, destroying the first and holding off the second until help arrives. A bold plan perhaps, but in my opinion the only one with a reasonable chance of success.

**“We can't wait for the enemy to converge on us. By doing that we will surrender the initiative to the enemy and will guarantee that sooner or later we will become the victims of a major converging attack.”**

**Boldness**

Again, we see the importance of boldness. Decisively defeating a superior enemy force is a bold and ambitious aim, and as Clausewitz' quote at the beginning of this discussion argues, such aims require bold and ambitious plans.

**Preparation & Shaping the Battlefield**

As we saw in "Battle of the Garagiola River," proper preparation will be an important element of our success. Once we recognized the possibility that two significant enemy forces could be converging on us from different directions, we should have been doing everything within our power to prevent their juncture and cooperation. In other words, by delaying one or the other of the enemy regiments, we want to try to shape the battlefield such that we have the opportunity to fight each separately on advantageous terms rather than both simultaneously.

Moreover, by thinking ahead and anticipating a situation like this we

give ourselves more time to prepare our bold stroke. In general, the larger a unit, the more time it requires to prepare and implement its plans. For one thing, it takes longer to disseminate plans because there are more layers of command. Likewise, it takes longer for combat information to reach the commander. Additionally, it takes longer for larger units to go into action once they receive their orders and to change directions once in action. A squad reacts faster to a changing situation than a regiment does. (This in itself is a good reason for pushing decisionmaking authority down to lower levels. It speeds up the organization's ability to act.)

**"Once we recognized the possibility that two significant enemy forces could be converging on us from different directions, we should have been doing everything within our power to prevent their juncture and cooperation."**

Recognizing the importance of planning doesn't mean taking our time and working out every last detail. The need for adequate planning is no excuse for acting slowly and ponderously. What this means is that as time is a precious commodity, we must get the most out of every minute. The time for preparation is in advance; not at the moment for action. As BGen Samuel B. Griffith wrote:

> Time is the essence in war, and while a defeat may be balanced by a battle won, days and hours—even minutes—frittered away can never be regained.

### Interior Lines and Mobility Equals Speed

One thing we have going for us in this situation is interior lines of communication. The fact that we are mechanized with a good road network for shifting our forces back and forth while the enemy is mostly foot mobile accentuates our mobility advantage. But these advantages are useless if we don't exploit them by generating the speed necessary to focus first against one enemy regiment and then against the other before the enemy can bring his overall superiority to bear. As Von Moltke's quote at the beginning of this discussion makes clear, the critical factor in operating on interior lines is having enough space and time to deal with each enemy force in turn before they can together put us on the receiving end of a *cheng/ch'i* maneuver. The basic question in this situation is, "Do we have enough time and space to defeat one regiment before the other arrives to catch us in a pincer?"

That's a difficult question to answer. It will depend on a lot of factors, not least of which is how well, how quickly and how aggressively we execute. It's important to remember that in the end it all comes down to performance. Even the most brilliant plan badly executed will still fail.

### A Near-Run Thing

The enemy will also have a lot to say about how things eventually turn out. What's he up? How aggressively will he act? How well will he coordinate the actions of his two regiments? Why has his first regiment halted at Gumbyville after battering our battalion? Why not exploit that success by pursuing aggressively? Have we hurt that regiment worse than we realized? Or is it the enemy's plan to attack with the southern regiment first? If once we strike one regiment the enemy attacks aggressively with the other, he could make things difficult for us. If, on the other hand, the movements of his two regiments aren't well coordinated, we might pull this off.

### Where To Strike First?

Having decided that we must attack, which regiment do we focus against and which do we hold off? Most readers recognized that although we are already concentrated mostly in the north, we were probably wiser to fix the northern regiment and attack the southern regiment. First, the enemy in the north is already halted and therefore poses less of an immediate problem. Second, the creek and woods across our front in the north will favor a defensive or delaying action. And third, as the northern regiment advances southeast, the relatively narrow front with river and swamp on either flank will limit the enemy's options and therefore facilitate a delaying action. Furthermore, striking first in the south has several advantages: First, the terrain around Furburg offers us better opportunities to strike the enemy's flanks; second, the terrain there is less suitable to a holding action; and third, the southern regiment is a much greater menace because it is already closer to the Danskin and Scornton bridges, is advancing rapidly, and directly threatens the bridges and our lines of communication.

WO1 Earl Schuette explained:

> With the enemy regiment to our north currently nursing its wounds, the focus of effort shifts to the south and the fresh enemy regiment closing on Furburg. It is necessary to stop its advance so as not to threaten our rear and cut us off from access to the bridges at Danskin and Scornton.

Likewise, 2dLt Patrick M. Hughes explained:

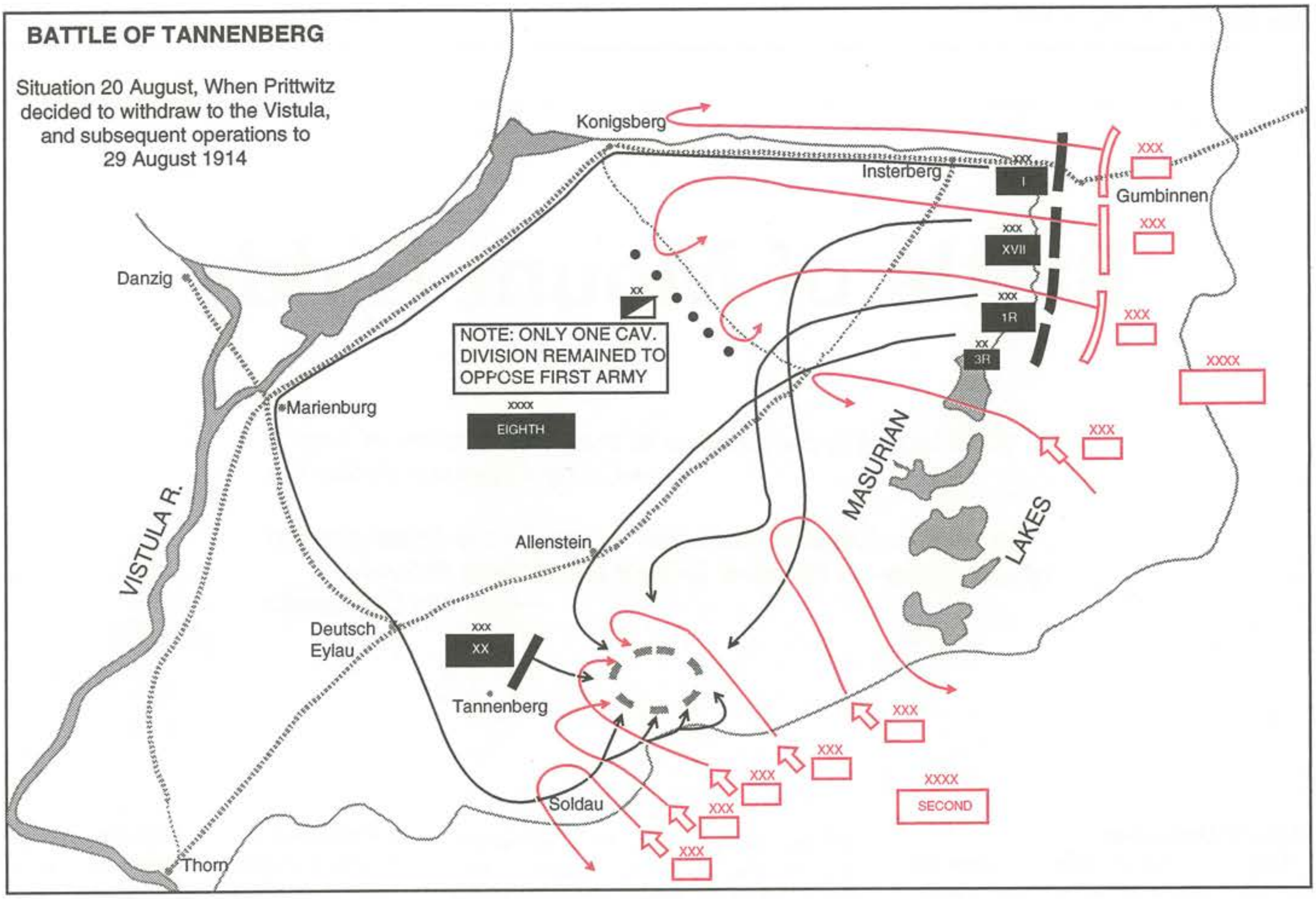
> We have the opportunity to defeat the enemy in detail and avoid fighting both regiments simultaneously. Judging by the first regiment's lack of pursuit of 1st Battalion, it has probably paused in order to reconsolidate and to do some reconnaissance of the Dadmamian Creek area. This hesitation and the second regiment's rapid advance dictate that the latter must be our first order of business.

Common solutions thus called for using a minimal force to occupy the northern regiment, while 3d Battalion fixed the southern regiment and two or more battalions moved south to strike the southern regiment's left flank, via the Ireburg-Furburg road or even around the west side of the swamp.

### Historically

This scenario is based loosely on the Tannenberg campaign of August-September 1914. When Germany invaded France according to the Schlieffen Plan, Russia came to the aid of France by invading German East Prussia. The German Eighth Army, which had a purely defensive mission in Prussia, was caught between Rennenkampf's Russian First Army advancing from the east and Samsonov's Russian Second Army from the southeast. Although the Masurian Lakes prevented the junction of the two armies, each of them alone outnumbered the German

**"The need for adequate planning is no excuse for acting slowly and ponderously."**




Eighth Army. After an engagement at Gumbinnen in which the Germans got the worst of it, the panicky German commander Prittwitz was sacked and replaced by the elderly Gen Paul von Hindenburg, with Gen Eric von Ludendorff as his chief of staff. Ludendorff immediately made plans for a bold encircling attack against Samsonov with forces stripped from the northern wing, leaving only a cavalry division to oppose the entire Russian First Army. When Hindenburg and Ludendorff arrived at Eighth Army headquarters they discovered that the chief of operations, LtCol Max Hoffman, had already made preparations for the same concept of operations. Ludendorff wrote:

> Gradually during the period from 24th to 26th August, the battle plan took shape in all its details. The great question was whether it would really be possible to withdraw the 1st Reserve Corps and the 17th Army Corps from their position facing Rennenkampf, so as to unite them with other units of the 8th Army, for a blow against the Narew [Second] Army. It depended solely on Rennenkampf himself, for if he knew how to make the most of his success at Gumbinnen and advance quickly my plan would be unthinkable.

**“It's important to remember that in the end it all comes down to performance. Even the most brilliant plan badly executed will still fail.”**

Rennenkampf obliged by advancing slowly, and the result was the destruction of the Russian Second Army in the Battle of Tannenberg. The Eighth Army then promptly turned back northeast and defeated the Russian First Army in the Battle of the Masurian Lakes. Russian losses in the two battles were about 250,000, compared to about 50,000 for the Germans. Tannenberg is generally considered a classic example of the use of interior lines to defeat two enemy forces, each in turn, before they could concentrate. USMC

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# Battle of Mount Giddy

*"Flank attack is the essence of the whole history of war."*
*—Count Alfred von Schlieffen*

*"A swift and vigorous transition to attack—the flashing sword of vengeance—is the most brilliant point of the defensive."*
*—Carl von Clausewitz*

**MAGTF Operations**

This scenario is different from all the others because we command a different type of military organization, a Marine air-ground task force (MAGTF), consisting of command, ground combat, aviation combat, and combat service support elements. As the MAGTF commander we are no longer responsible for the detailed tactical employment of units on the ground. We have a ground combat element (GCE) commander whose responsibility that is. Nor are we involved in the detailed employment of our aviation combat element (ACE) assets; we have an ACE commander for that. Rather, we are concerned with the overall integration of all the elements of the MAGTF. In addition, we coordinate operations with higher headquarters—e.g., a joint task force (JTF)—and are probably responsible for coordination with the local civilian government and with other aspects of civil-military relations.

The object is to assign missions and provide guidance to our subordinate commanders that are sufficiently specific to ensure the accomplishment of the mission without treading on the province of those subordinates.

**What's the Enemy Up To?**

Trying to win the war with a bold and inspired stroke, it looks like. By seizing the initiative in a secondary theater, the enemy threatens to preempt the JTF's major offensive to the north by endangering key objectives in the JTF's rear. So the danger is not just to our MEB, but to the entire theater strategy.

**“ The object is to assign missions and provide guidance to our subordinate commanders that are sufficiently specific to ensure the accomplishment of the mission without treading on the province of those subordinates. ”**

The enemy has completely fooled our intelligence system and duped us into thinking he was massing in one place when he was actually massing in another. He has managed to concentrate overwhelming superiority (including aviation) at one time and place while we have remained dispersed. Not content with a local tactical success, he has exploited his breakthrough with an eye toward dealing us a knockout blow. He seems to have thrown everything he's got through the breach and is racing north, with nothing between him and Brut but miles of coastal desert plain. Some of his forces have turned left toward Nevertheless, probably with the intent of cutting off the lines of retreat of our westernmost ground forces while at the same time protecting his own left flank. But his main effort seems to be toward Brut.

Without question, this is an extremely dangerous situation—perhaps even desperate. A bold, ambitious, and from all indications, skilled enemy commander has seized the initiative and is exploiting it to the fullest. At the same time, however, if we act quickly and aggressively ourselves, we have the opportunity to deal the enemy a decisive counterstroke. Not only that, but we have no alternative.

**Is the Glass Half Full . . . ?**

What was your immediate estimate of the situation as you read this scenario? Bad? Terrible? Desperate? Or, even as you recognized the seriousness of the situation, did you see opportunity? Was your main impression that of a massive penetration of your front or of a huge enemy flank waiting to be crushed? The ability to seize opportunities demands the ability to spot opportunities, sometimes even

where others spot crises. Are you more concerned with what the enemy can do to you than with what you want to do to the enemy? The commander who is overly concerned about having his own flank turned isn't likely to pull off many envelopments.

This is not to suggest that attitude is all that matters; but at the same time we shouldn't underestimate the importance of the commander's state of mind, which will be reflected throughout the entire unit. As Hans von Seekt wrote: "The will of Frederick and Napoleon was a living force in the humblest grenadier."

The commander who sees danger everywhere he looks and whose aim is just to stave off disaster can expect to accomplish nothing more than that and may likely accomplish much less. And conversely, as we've previously discussed, the first prerequisite in achieving a great victory is having the nerve to try for one.

**"The ability to seize opportunities demands the ability to spot opportunities, sometimes even where others spot crises."**

**Critical Enemy Vulnerability**

In order to have any hope of seizing the initiative from the enemy and retrieving this situation, we've got to hit him where it's going to hurt the most. How do we do that? The natural inclination is to try to catch his leading elements, which are doing the most damage. But this would be striking directly into his strength. Moreover, it would be futile—like trying to deal with a dam break by trying to scoop up in buckets all the water that has already escaped rather than by trying to plug the break.

The enemy has penetrated deeply on a very narrow front, and consequently has long, exposed lines of communication. In other words, he's got a huge flank. Given the distances he's got to travel, he can't afford to have his lines cut. That's what we've got to strike.

**Options**

So what are our options?

• *Option 1: Fall back, reconstitute front.* Numerous readers suggested that we fall back to a subsequent position from which we continue our mission of delaying the enemy. This approach is doomed to failure. The enemy is already behind us and racing north at breakneck speed, while our own situation is in disarray. How do you get in front of an enemy who is already past you and moves as fast as you do? You don't. While our original mission was to forestall a decision on this front, this is no longer an option. The enemy is intent on a decisive battle, and at this point he's calling the shots. By piercing our defense he has forced us to take decisive, and also risky, action.

• *Option 2: Flank counterstroke:* As with options covered in the discussions of Scenarios #10 and #12, the intent here is to crush an advancing enemy's flank as he goes by. The difference is that in those scenarios we did this by design; in this one we are exploiting an opportunity presented by the enemy. The way to deal with a penetration such as this is to chop it off at the base. Some of the leading enemy forces may get through to Brut, but given the distances involved, if we successfully sever the enemy's line of operations, he won't be able to sustain an organized advance. We can have a much greater effect by attacking into the enemy's flank and rear. The narrow coastal plains, which are bordered by the sea on one side and mountains on the other, are a natural bottleneck. If we can pin the enemy there against the coast, he will be vulnerable to coordinated massing of our aviation and ground forces.

• *Option 3: Ask for reinforcements.* Obviously, we'll be talking continuously with higher headquarters, appraising our higher commander of the developing situation. As we discussed, this development endangers the entire JTF situation and so is clearly of concern to the JTF commander. Obviously, the JTF commander doesn't want to strip forces from his offensive to reinforce our area, but he may feel he has no choice—he can't afford to lose Brut and Damoose. His decision will depend in part on how much faith he still has in our ability to accomplish the mission. If he does decide to send reinforcements, he will send the minimum necessary to stave off disaster.

**A Sample Plan**

The following is a sample concept for the employment of the MEB based on Option #2. Notice that it doesn't provide detailed assignments for subordinate units within the GCE or for detailed operations of the ACE:

> My intent is to bottle the enemy up in the narrow coastal plains and destroy him there by a coordinated air-ground attack. To do this, I envision a two-phase operation. In the first phase, the GCE, supported by the ACE, attacks with all available combat power generally east and northeast, cutting off his line of operation, taking him in the flank, and pinning him against the coast. Meanwhile, the ACE attempts to fix the enemy by delaying and disrupting his advance toward Brut. Initial main effort is the ACE until we can get the enemy under control and the GCE back into action. In the second phase, the GCE and ACE will launch a coordinated attack to destroy the enemy forces trapped along the coast. The CSSE [combat service support element] and ACE are responsible for the defense of Damoose and Brut respectively.

**Fix-and-Flank**

This plan is yet another example of the fix-and-flank concept that is so fundamental to tactics—but with a twist. What makes this example different is the composition of the complementary forces. The *ch'i*, or flanking force, consists of our GCE supported by the ACE. The *cheng*, however, doesn't consist of forces on the ground, but of the fires of the ACE. It is primarily our aviation firepower that will fix the enemy force. Although the ACE is at the same time providing some support to the GCE, it is not merely a supporting element, but has a primary mission of its own. (As the MAGTF commander we'll have to give guidance on how much of its assets the ACE devotes to its fixing mission and how much to its mission of supporting the GCE.) Moreover, it's conceivable that the GCE could support the ACE

**"The commander who sees danger everywhere he looks and whose aim is just to stave off disaster can expect to accomplish nothing more than that and may likely accomplish much less."**

in the accomplishment of the fixing mission. If the narrow coastal plains are a bottleneck, we might think about providing a cork by lifting a small ground force (battalion?) by helicopter to establish a blocking position south of Brut. Since we gave responsibility for fixing the enemy to the ACE, we might consider having the small blocking force on the ground working for the ACE.

**Adaptability & Flexibility**

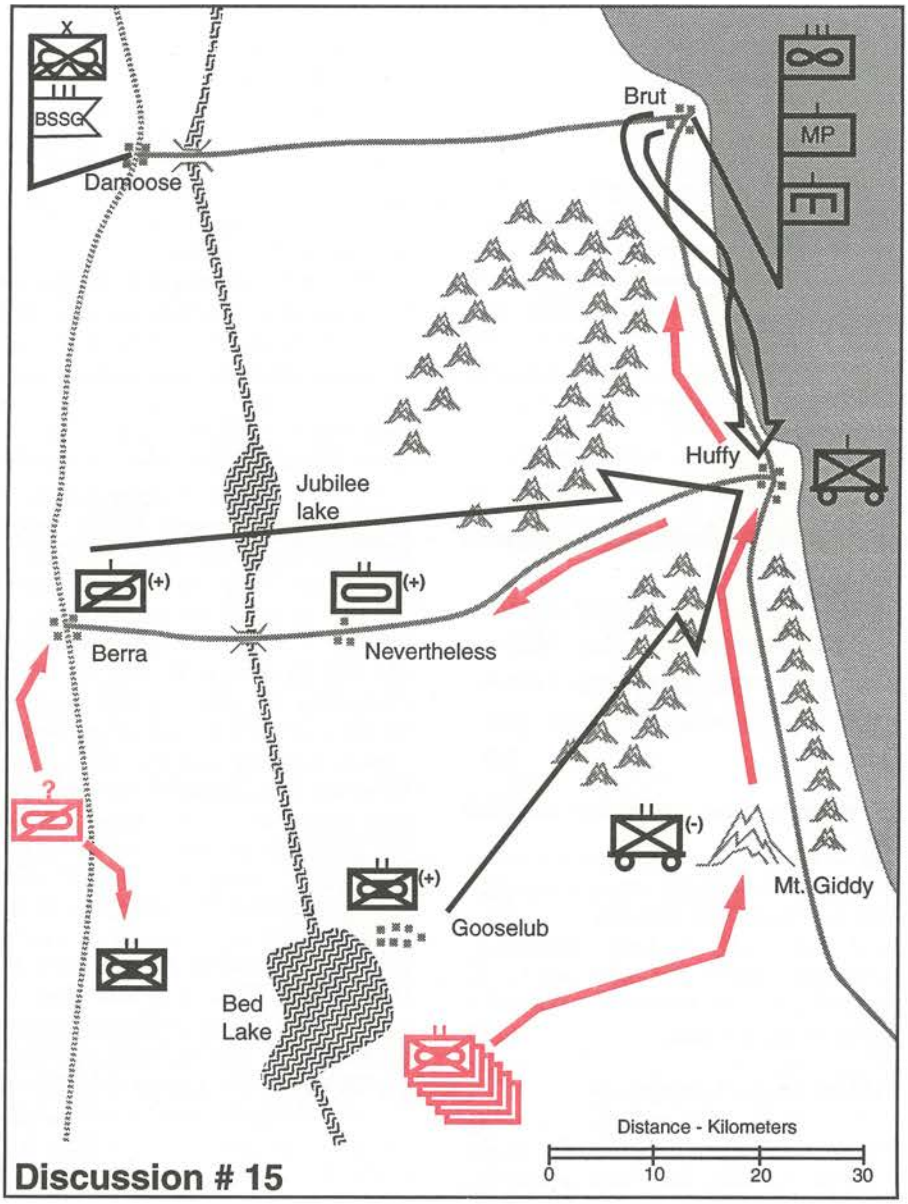
This battle which the enemy has forced on us is not going to be over in a matter of hours or probably even in days. We're looking at an operation lasting a week or more, in which the situation is continually going to develop and change. We have to realize that whatever decision we make in this instance, it is not the final decision. We will have to adapt and modify our plans as the situation develops, issuing new orders as appropriate. Any solution we develop to this scenario should be simple enough that it holds up under changing conditions and should be flexible enough that we can easily adapt it as those conditions change. As Gen George S. Patton said:

> Plans must be simple and flexible. Actually they only form a datum plane from which you build as necessity directs or opportunity offers.

**Historically**

Students of military history may recognize this scenario. On a slightly different scale and with modernized equipment and organization, it is roughly a mirror image of the situation facing the Turks in Palestine late in World War I. On 21 September 1918, Gen Sir Edmund Allenby's infantry had just pierced the Turkish front along the Mediterranean coast at the Second Battle of Megiddo. His Desert Mounted Corps had "found the G in gap," as the cavalrymen liked to say, pouring north along the Plain of Sharon and breaking out through the narrow passes above Haifa into the great Plain of Esdraelon, some 40 miles in the Turkish rear, headed for Beirut, Nazareth, Deraa, and Damascus. At the same time, T. E. Lawrence's Arab Force had swept out of its desert base at Azrak to cut the Hejaz railway—the Turks' main line of retreat—and was waiting in Deraa as Allenby's cavalry arrived.

Through an elaborate deception plan, Allenby had, over the course of weeks, simulated the massing of forces




in the Jordan Valley near Jerusalem when in fact he was concentrating overwhelming superiority opposite Megiddo. He commandeered the largest hotel in Jerusalem and established a sprawling headquarters there. He moved units east along dusty trails by daylight and sent them back west under cover of darkness. He established phony assembly areas in the Jordan Valley. The assembly areas which he had established in the west weeks before were intentionally much larger than needed, so that as more forces concentrated there it was not necessary to expand the assembly areas. He ordered Lawrence in the east to procure all the forage he could get his hands on—enough for the needs of an entire army. So convinced were the Turks that the attack would come near Jerusalem, the story goes, that an Indian deserter who disclosed the true plan to the Turks on the eve of the offensive was dismissed by the Turks as an obvious ruse.

The Turks had three "armies" holding the line from the Mediterranean in the west to Amman in the east. (Each Turkish army was roughly the equivalent of a British corps.) Allenby's initial plan was much less ambitious than the one he actually executed, involving a shallow envelopment aimed at Nablus which might have destroyed the Turkish army along the coast but which would not have unhinged the entire Turkish position. (Remember:

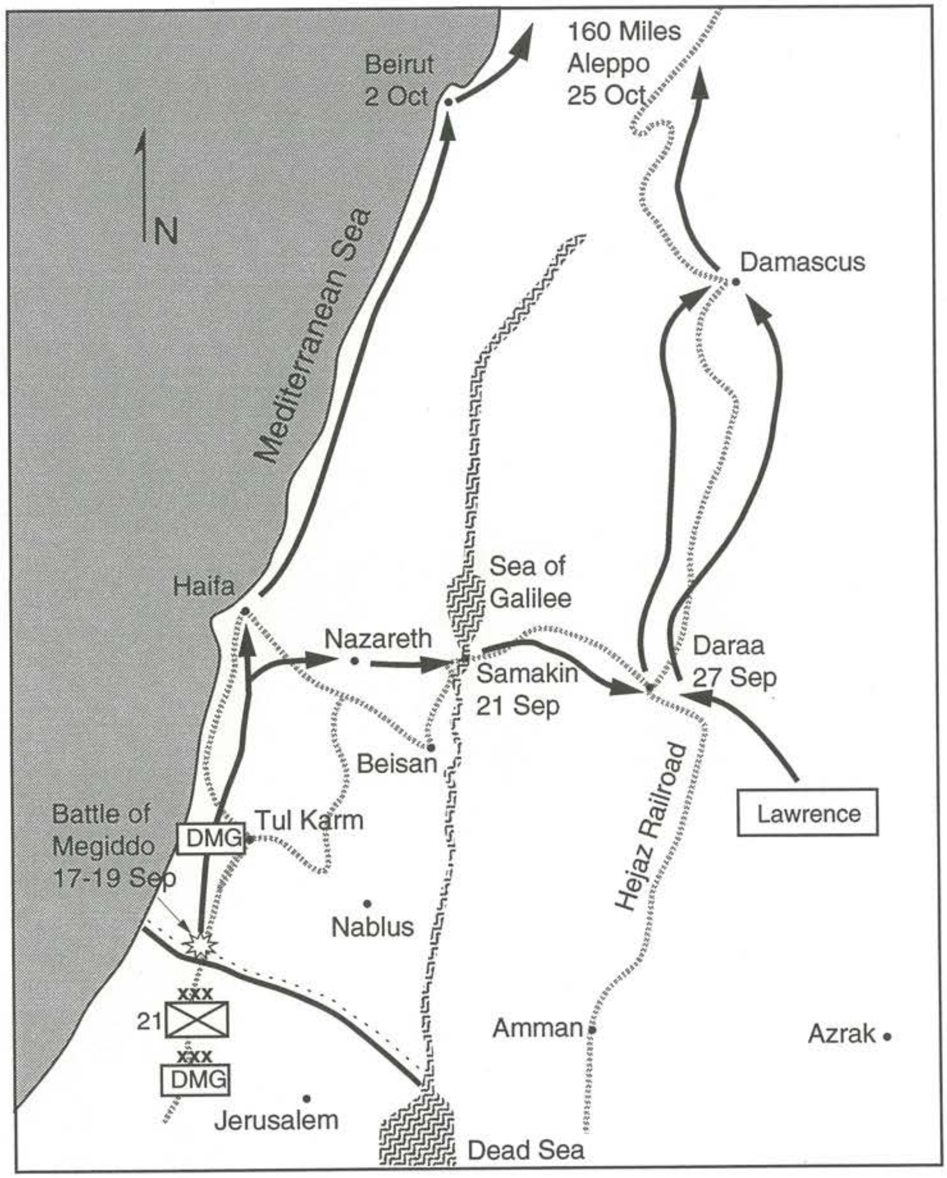
Decisive victories are the result of ambitious plans.) How did the Turks react to Allenby's bolder move? Essentially, they did not—or at least their reaction was a clear case of too little, too late. Their countermove with only one battalion to bottle up Allenby's cavalry divisions in the Plain of Sharon was too slow. With their lines of retreat severed at Haifa, Nazareth, and especially Deraa, the Turkish armies crumbled. The Battle of Megiddo in the

**“Any remote chance the Turks had lay in a bold, decisive, and immediate stroke, but any chance they had they surrendered by their indecisiveness.”**

opening act was the only pitched fighting of the entire campaign; the rest amounted to a rout. In 5 weeks, Allenby's army had advanced 360 miles to Aleppo, captured some 78,000 prisoners and 360 guns, and destroyed the 3 Turkish armies. The Turks sued for peace.

What could the Turks have done? Perhaps nothing. Arguably, once the Desert Mounted Corps had successfully broken out of the constrictive Plain of Sharon by way of the narrow passes above Haifa, the issue was settled. Allenby's biographer, Gen Sir Archibald Wavell, wrote:

> The campaign had, in fact, been practically won before a shot was fired, and Allenby realized it better than anyone. . . . The Turkish armies may have stirred a little uneasily on the evening of September 18, 1918, with some sense of an impending offensive, but of its imminence and its weight they had no conception. Their traditional Ottoman stubbornness and skill in defence were of no avail to them here. This was to be no soldiers' battle, but the manoeuvre of a great master of war.




Any remote chance the Turks had lay in a bold, decisive, and immediate stroke, but any chance they had they surrendered by their indecisiveness.

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# Appendixes

Keep your own orders short; get them out in time; issue them personally by voice if you can. . . . Plans must be simple and flexible. Actually they only form a datum plane from which you build as necessity directs or opportunity offers.

**–Gen George S. Patton**

# Glossary of Tactical Terms

In order to ensure effective communications, it is important to use terms that are universally understood. The following basic terms are taken from Joint, Marine Corps, and U.S. Army doctrinal publications.

A

**Advance Guard**—Detachment sent ahead of the main force to ensure its uninterrupted advance; to protect the main body against surprise; to facilitate the advance by removing obstacles and repairing roads and brigades; and to cover the deployment of the main body if it is committed to action. (*Joint Pub 1-02*)
**Ambush**—A surprise attack by fire from concealed positions on a moving or temporarily halted enemy. (*FM 101-5-1*)
**Assault**—The culmination of an attack which closes with the enemy. (*OH 6-1*)
**Assault Position**—That position between the line of departure and the objective in an attack from which forces assault the objective. (*FM 101-5-1*)
**Assembly Area**—An area in which a command is assembled preparatory to further action. (*Joint Pub 1-02*)
**Attach**—To place units or personnel in an organization where such placement is relatively temporary. The commander of the formation, unit or organization receiving the attachment will exercise the same degree of command and control thereover as he does over the units and persons organic to his command. (*Joint Pub 1-02*)
**Attack Position**—The last position occupied by the assault echelon before crossing the line of departure. (*Joint Pub 1-02*)
**Attrition**—The reduction of effectiveness of a force caused by loss of personnel and materiel. (*Joint Pub 1-02*)
**Axis of Advance**—A line of advance assigned for purposes of control; often a road or a group of roads, or a designated series of locations, extending in the direction of the enemy. (*Joint Pub 1-02*) Compared to **direction of attack**.

B

**Barrier**—A coordinated series of obstacles designed or employed to canalize, direct, restrict, delay or stop the movement of an opposing force, and to impose additional losses in personnel and equipment on the opposing force. (*Joint Pub 1-02*)
**Base of Fire**—Fire placed on an enemy force or position to reduce or eliminate the enemy's capability to interfere by fire and/or movement with friendly maneuver elements. (*FM 101-5-1*)
**Blocking Position**—A defensive position so sited as to deny the enemy access to a given area or to prevent his advance in a given direction. (*Joint Pub 1-02*)
**Bound**—A single movement, usually from cover to cover, made by troops, often under enemy fire. Distance covered in one movement by a unit advancing by bounds. (*Joint Pub 1-02*)
**Boundary**—Line by which areas of responsibility between adjacent units are defined. (*Joint Pub 1-02*)
**Bridgehead**—An area of ground held or to be gained on the enemy's side of an obstacle. (*Joint Pub 1-02*)
**Bypass**—To move around an obstacle, position or enemy force to maintain the momentum of advance. (*FM 101-5-1*)

C

**Canalize**—To restrict operations to a narrow zone by use of existing or reinforcing obstacles or by fire or bombing. (*Joint Pub 1-02*)
**Checkpoint**—A predetermined point on the ground used as a means of controlling movement. (*Joint Pub 1-02*)
**Close Air Support**—Air action against hostile targets which are in close proximity to friendly forces and which requires detailed integration with the fire and movement of those forces. (*Joint Pub 1-02*)
**Commander's Intent**—Commander's vision of operations—how he expects to fight and what he expects to accomplish. (*FM 101-5-1*)
**Command Post**—A unit's or subunit's headquarters where the commander and the staff perform their activities. (*Joint Pub 1-02*)
**Concealment**—The protection from observation or surveillance. (*Joint Pub 1-02*)
**Concept of Operations**—A clear and concise statement of the line of action chosen by a commander in order to accomplish the mission. (*Joint Pub 1-02*) Normally contains a **scheme of maneuver** and **fire support plan**.
**Consolidate**—To organize and strengthen a newly captured position so that it can be used against the enemy. (*Joint Pub 1-02*)
**Contain**—To stop, hold, or surround the forces of the enemy or to cause the enemy to center activity on a given front and to prevent his withdrawing any part of his forces for use elsewhere. (*Joint Pub 1-02*) Also **holding attack**.
**Counterattack**—Attack by part or all of a defending force against an enemy attacking force, for such specific purposes as regaining ground lost or cutting off or destroying enemy advance units, and with the general objective of denying to the enemy the attainment of his purpose in attacking. (*Joint Pub 1-02*)
**Cover**—1. Protection from the effects of fire. 2. The mission assigned a **covering force**.
**Covering Fire**—Fire used to protect troops when they are with range of enemy small arms. (*Joint Pub 1-02*)
**Covering Force**—A force operating apart from the main force for the purpose of intercepting, engaging, delaying, disorganizing, and deceiving the enemy before he can attack the main force. (*Joint Pub 1-02*)

**Cross-Attachment**—The exchange of subordinate units between units for a temporary period. (*FM 101-5-1*)

D

**Decisive Engagement**—An engagement in which a unit is considered fully committed and cannot maneuver or extricate itself. In the absence of outside assistance, the action must be fought to a conclusion. (*FM 101-5-1*)

**Defense in Depth**—The siting of mutually supporting defense positions to absorb and progressively weaken attack, prevent initial observations of the whole position by the enemy, and to allow the commander to maneuver his reserve. (*Joint Pub 1-01*)

**Defilade**—Protection from hostile observation and fire provided by an obstacle such as a hull, ridge or bank. (*Joint Pub 1-02*)

**Delaying Action**—An operation in which a force under pressure trades space for time by slowing the enemy's momentum and inflicting maximum damage on the enemy without becoming decisively engaged. (*Joint Pub 1-02*)

**Deliberate Attack**—A type of offensive operation characterized by preplanned coordinated employment of firepower and maneuver. (*Joint Pub 1-02*) Compared to **hasty attack**.

**Demonstration**—An attack or show of force on a front where a decision is not sought, made with the aim of deceiving the enemy. (*Joint Pub 1-02*) Compared to **diversionary attack**.

**Direction of Attack**—A specific direction or route that the main attack or center of mass of the unit will follow. The unit is restricted, required to attack as indicated, and is not normally allowed to bypass the enemy. (*Joint Pub 1-02*) Compared to **axis of advance**.

E

**Envelopment**—An offensive maneuver in which the main attacking force passes around or over the enemy principal defensive positions to secure objectives to the enemy's rear. (*Joint Pub 1-02*) See also **turning movement**.

F

**Feint**—A limited-objective attack involving contact with the enemy, varying in size from a raid to a supporting attack. Feints are used to cause the enemy to act in three predictable ways: to employ his reserve improperly, to shift his supporting fires, or to reveal his defensive fires.

**Fire and Maneuver**—The process of one or more elements establishing a base of fire to engage the enemy while the other element(s) maneuver to an advantageous position from which to close with and destroy or capture the enemy. (*FMFRP 0-14*)

**Fire and Movement**—A technique primarily used in the assault wherein a unit or element advances by bounds or rushes with subelements alternately moving and providing covering fire for other moving subelements. Fire and movement may be done by individuals (personnel or vehicles) or units (such as fire teams or squads). Usually, fire and movement are used only when under effective fire from the enemy because it is relatively slow and difficult to control. (*FMFRP 0-14*)

**Fire Plan**—A tactical plan for using the weapons of a unit or formation so that their fire will be coordinated. (*Joint Pub 1-02*)

**Fragmentary Order**—An abbreviated form of an operation order that eliminates the need for restating information contained in a basic operation order. (*Joint Pub 1-02*) Also **frag order** or **FragO**.

**Frontal Attack**—An offensive maneuver in which the main action is directed against the front of the enemy forces. (*Joint Pub 1-02*)

G

**Gap**—Any break or breach in the continuity of tactical dispositions beyond small-arms coverage. (*FM 101-5-1*)

**Guard**—A security element whose primary task is to protect the main force by fighting to gain time, while also observing and reporting information. (*Joint Pub 1-02*) **Advance guard, flank guard** and **rear guard**. Compared to **screen, cover**.

H

**Hasty Attack**—An attack in which preparation time is deliberately traded for speed in order to exploit an opportunity. (*Joint Pub 1-02*) Compared to **deliberate attack**.

I

**Infiltration**—1. The movement through or into an area or territory occupied by either friendly or enemy troops or organizations. The movement is made, either by small groups or by individuals, at extended or irregular intervals.When used in connection with the enemy, it infers that contact is avoided. . . . (*Joint Pub 1-02*)

K

**Killing Zone**—An area in which the commander plans to force the enemy to concentrate so as to destroy him by fire. (*Joint Pub 1-02*) Also **engagement area**.

L

**Linkup**—An operation wherein two friendly forces join together in a hostile area. (*OH 6-1*) **Linkup point**.

M

**Main Attack**—The principal attack or effort into which the commander throws the full weight of the offensive power at his disposal. An attack directed against the chief objective of the campaign or battle. (*Joint Pub 1-02*) Compared to **supporting attack**.

**Main Effort**—The main or most important task to be performed in the accomplishment of the overall mission; receives priority of fires and other support. The term sometimes refers to the subordinate unit assigned that task. Also **focus of effort(s), point of main effort**.

**Maneuver**—Employment of forces on the battlefield through movement in combination with fire or fire potential to achieve a position of advantage over the enemy. (*Joint Pub 1-02*)

**Meeting Engagement**—A combat action that occurs when a moving force engages an enemy at an unexpected time and place. (*Joint Pub 1-02*)

**Mission Type Order**—1. Order issued to lower unit that includes the accomplishment of the total mission assigned to the higher headquarters. 2. Order to a unit to perform a mission without specifying how it is to be accomplished. (*Joint Pub 1-02*)
**Mobile Defense**—Defense of an area or position in which maneuver is used with organization and utilization of terrain to seize the initiative from the enemy. (*Joint Pub 1-02*) Compared to **position defense**.
**Movement to Contact**—An offensive operation designed to gain or reestablish contact with the enemy. (*Joint Pub 1-02*) Also **advance to contact**.

## O

**Objective**—The physical object of the action taken, e.g., a definite tactical feature, the seizure or holding of which is essential to the commander's plan. (*Joint Pub 1-02*)
**Objective Rallying Point**—A location near an objective from which a patrol launches its final actions in the objective area and to which it returns afterward. Also **ORP**.
**Observation Post**—A position from which military observations are made, or fire directed and adjusted, and which possesses appropriate communications; may be airborne. (*Joint Pub 1-02*) Also **OP**.
**Obstacle**—Any natural or man-made obstruction that canalizes, delays, restricts, or diverts movement of a force; classified as either **existing** or **reinforcing.** (*FM 101-5-1*) See **barrier**.
**On-Call Target**—A planned target other than a scheduled target on which fire is delivered when requested. (*Joint Pub 1-02*)
**Operation Order**—A directive issued by a commander to subordinate commanders for the purpose of effecting the coordinated execution of an operation. (*Joint Pub 1-02*)
**Overwatch**—A tactical technique in which one element is positioned to support the movement of another element with immediate fire. (*FM 101-5-1*)

## P

**Patrol**—A detachment of forces sent out for the purpose of gathering information or carrying out a destructive, mopping-up, or security mission. (*Joint Pub 1-02*)
**Penetration**—A form of offensive which seeks to break through the enemy's defense and disrupt the defensive system. (*Joint Pub 1-02*) Also **breakthrough**.
**Position Defense**—A type of defense in which the bulk of the defending force is disposed in selected tactical localities where the decisive battle is to be fought. Principal reliance is placed on the ability of the forces in the defended localities to maintain their positions and to control the terrain between them. (*Joint Pub 1-02*) Compared to **mobile defense**.
**Pursuit**—An offensive operation designed to catch or cut off a hostile force attempting to escape, with the aim of destroying it. (*Joint Pub 1-02*)

## R

**Raid**—An operation, usually small scale, involving a swift penetration of hostile territory to secure information, confuse the enemy, or to destroy his installations. It ends with a planned withdrawal upon completion of the assigned mission. (*Joint Pub 1-02*)
**Reconnaissance**—A mission undertaken to obtain, by visual observation or other detection methods, information about the activities and resources of the enemy. (*Joint Pub 1-02*)
**Reserve**—A part of a force, held under the control of the commander as a maneuvering force to influence future action. (*Joint Pub 1-02*)

## S

**Scheduled Target**—A planned target on which fire is to be delivered at a specific time. (*Joint Pub 1-02*) Compared to **on-call target**.
**Scheme of Maneuver**—The tactical plan to be executed by a force in order to seize assigned objectives. (*Joint Pub 1-02*)
**Screen**—A security element whose primary task is to observe, identify and report information, and which fights only in self-preservation. (*Joint Pub 1-02*) Compared to **guard, cover**.
**Sector of Fire**—An area required to be covered by fire by an individual, weapon or unit. (*Joint Pub 1-02*)
**Spoiling Attack**—A tactical maneuver employed to seriously impair a hostile attack while the enemy is in the process of forming or assembling for an attack. (*Joint Pub 1-02*)
**Supporting Attack**—An offensive operation carried out in conjunction with a main attack and designed to achieve one or more of the following:

a. deceive the enemy;
b. destroy or pin down enemy forces which could interfere with the main attack;
c. control ground whose occupation by the enemy will hinder the main attack; or
d. force the enemy to commit reserves prematurely or in an indecisive area. (*Joint Pub 1-02*)

**Suppression**—Temporary degradation of the performance of a weapons system or unit below the level needed to fulfill its mission, by an opposing force. (*Joint Pub 1-02*) See **covering fire**.

## T

**Task Organization**—1. An organization formed to carry out a specific task. 2. The process of creating such an organization. (*OH 6-1*)
**Turning Movement**—A variation of the envelopment in which the attacking force passes around or over the enemy's principal defensive positions to secure objectives deep in the enemy's rear to force the enemy to abandon his position or divert major forces to meet the threat. (*Joint Pub 1-02*)

## W

**Warning Order**—A preliminary notice of an action or order which is to follow. (*Joint Pub 1-02*)
**Withdrawal**—A planned operation in which a force in contact disengages from an enemy force. (*Joint Pub 1-02*)

## Z

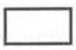
**Zone of Action**—A tactical subdivision of a larger area, the responsibility of which is assigned to a tactical unit; generally applied to offensive action. (*Joint Pub 1-02*) Compared to **sector** in the defense.

# Glossary of Map Symbols

As with terminology, standardized map symbols improve our ability to communicate quickly with minimal misunderstanding. Through the use of overlays the commander can quickly and effectively communicate a plan, concept or situation. This appendix provides information for the use of basic tactical symbols. For a more detailed discussion of map symbols and control measures, see *Operational Handbook 6–1* or *Field Manual 101–5–1*.

## Units, Installations, Activities

• *Basic Symbols*

Unit 

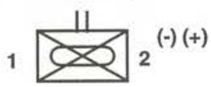
Headquarters 

Logistical Installation 

Observation Post 

• *Additional Information.*

Each basic symbol requires additional information to describe the functions or characteristics of that unit, installation or activity. This information is provided in specific locations in and around the basic symbol, as shown in this example:

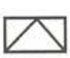



- The unit size is located directly on top of the basic symbol. (Battalion)
- The role indicator is provided inside the symbol. (Mechanized Infantry)
- The unique designation is provided directly to the left of the symbol. (1st Battalion)
- The higher headquarters is provided directly to the right of the symbol. (2d Marine Regiment)
- Any attachments or detachments are represented by (-) and/or (+) to the upper right of the symbol.

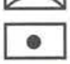
• *Unit Size*

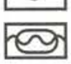
| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Fire Team | Ø | Squad | • |
| Section | • • | Platoon/Detachment | • • • |
| Company/Battery | I | Battalion/Squadron | II |
| Regiment | III | Brigade | X |
| Division | XX | Corps/Force | XXX |

• *Role Indicator*

Antitank 

Air Defense 

Artillery 

Assault Amphibian (AA) 

Engineer 

Infantry 

Light Armor 

Mechanized Infantry 

Motorized Infantry 

Reconnaissance 

Tank 

MAGTF (Marine air-ground task force) 

•*Depicting the Enemy*

Enemy units, installations or equipment are depicted one of three ways: (1) by using color Red on a multicolor overlay, (2) by using double lines where appropriate, or (3) by putting EN to the lower right of the symbol.

## Unit Symbol Test

Draw symbols for the following units:

3d Plt, Co G, 2d Bn,
2d Mar

Co B, 2nd Assault
Amphibian Bn

Btry C, 1st Bn, 11th Mar

1st Bn, 4th Mech Inf Regt,
22d Div (Enemy)

1st Light Armored Recon Bn
1st MarDiv

7th Marine Expeditionary
Brigade

## Weapons and Vehicles

Bars across the shaft of a weapon indicate size: one for medium, two for heavy. The base of the shaft indicates the function of the weapons system i.e. antitank, air defense, etc. A numeral to the lower right of the symbol can represent number of weapons or pieces of equipment.

Light · Med · Heavy

Air-Defense Gun

Antitank (AT) Gun

AT Missile

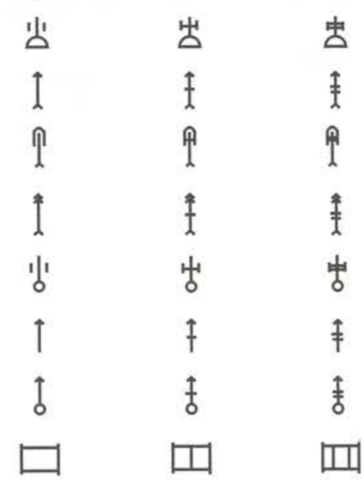
AT Rocket Launcher

Howitzer

Machinegun/Automatic Weapon

Mortar

Tank

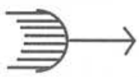


Light Armored Vehicle 


Assault Amphibious Vehicle 

## Control Measures

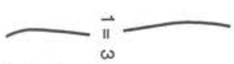
- *Points, Areas, and Lines.*

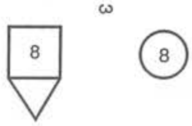
Ambush 

Assembly Area 


Attack Position 


Battle or Blocking Position (BP) 

Battalion Boundary 


Checkpoint 


Coordinating Point 

Linkup Point 

Objective 

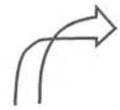

Phase Line 


Target 

- *Movement and Activity*

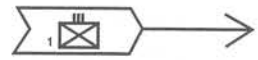
Attack Arrowhead 

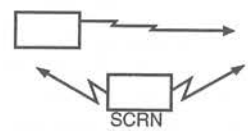

Axis of Advance (Ground) 

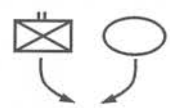
Axis of Advance (Heliborne) 

Delaying Action 

Direction of Attack 

Follow and Support 

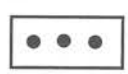

Reconnaissance or Security 


Withdraw 

- *Miscellaneous*

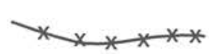
Antitank Ditch 

Fortified Line 

Antitank Minefield 

Antipersonnel Minefield 

Bridge or Gap 

Wire 

Landing Zone 


Trace of Forward Dispositions (Friendly) 

# Combat Orders

A word is in order about combat orders. They are the means by which commanders at all levels communicate their decisions to subordinates and the means by which you're required to present your solutions to the TDGs. Depending on the situation, and especially on the amount of time available, the commander's instructions may take one of several forms. They may be a full operation order—at lower levels often called a five-paragraph order because of its format. They may be a fragmentary order, an abbreviated form of the operation order that contains only the elements of the full order essential to the situation. Or, instructions may take the form of a warning order, by which the commander tells his units to prepare for an expected operation but not yet to execute it. As with a fragmentary order, there is no prescribed format to a warning order; the commander tells what he knows at the time in order to give his subordinates whatever information he can to help them prepare. Once operations have begun, fragmentary orders and warning orders are the norm. To maintain a high operational tempo, we rely on simple, concise orders issued orally, and we generally try to avoid lengthy, written orders.

While the format of the order may help to organize information, it is far less important than the contents or substance of the order. Regardless of format, if the order communicates the essential information clearly and forcefully, it's a good order. The elements of information that an order should convey include:

- Any changes or elements in the *situation* that will significantly influence the actions of the unit.
- The *mission*—what needs to be done.
- The *commander's intent*—why it needs to be done and what the intended end result of the action is.
- The *concept of operations*—a broad description of the overall plan, normally including a *scheme of maneuver* and a *fire support plan*.
- The main effort—the main task or component of the plan around which the others revolve and which the others support.
- Tasks to subordinate units—what each unit is to do, and why.
- Any coordinating instructions to ensure coordination between subordinate units.

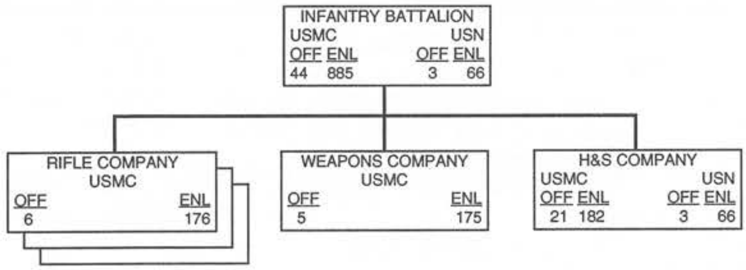


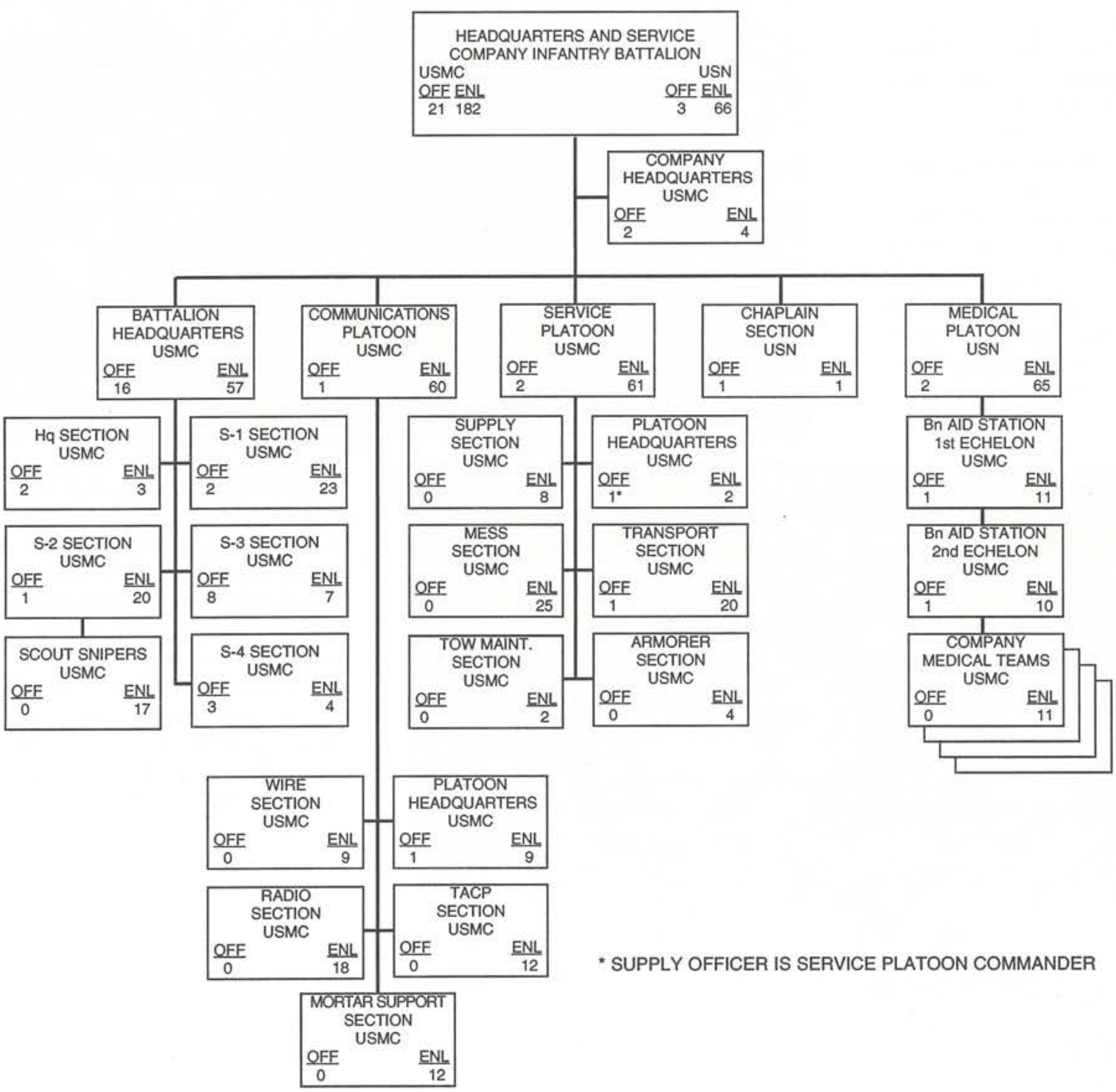


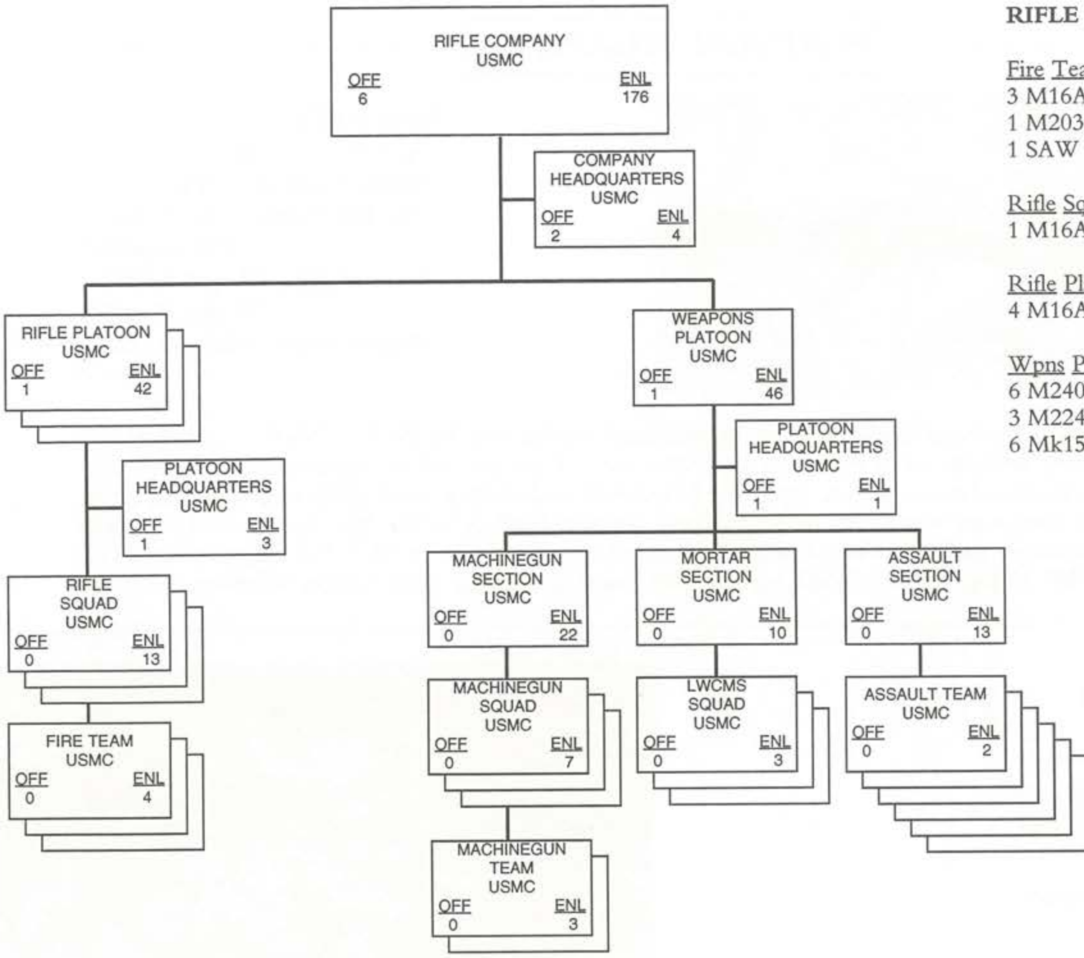
Following the prescribed format often helps to communicate this information. But you shouldn't become a slave to the format. You should adapt the format to support your tactics, and not vice versa. It's more important to worry about *what* you're trying to say than whether it's in the proper format. Anyone interested in the precise format for combat orders can find that information in *FMFM 3-1, Command and Staff Action*, or any number of other doctrinal publications.

For samples of fragmentary orders, see the discussions to scenarios #1, 8, 9, and 12. For an example of a fairly complete warning order, see scenario #6. In the July 1992 issue of the *Marine Corps Gazette*, Maj Dirk J. Vangeison describes a system units can use to issue warning orders on a more timely basis.

# U.S. Marine Infantry Battalion Organization and Weapons





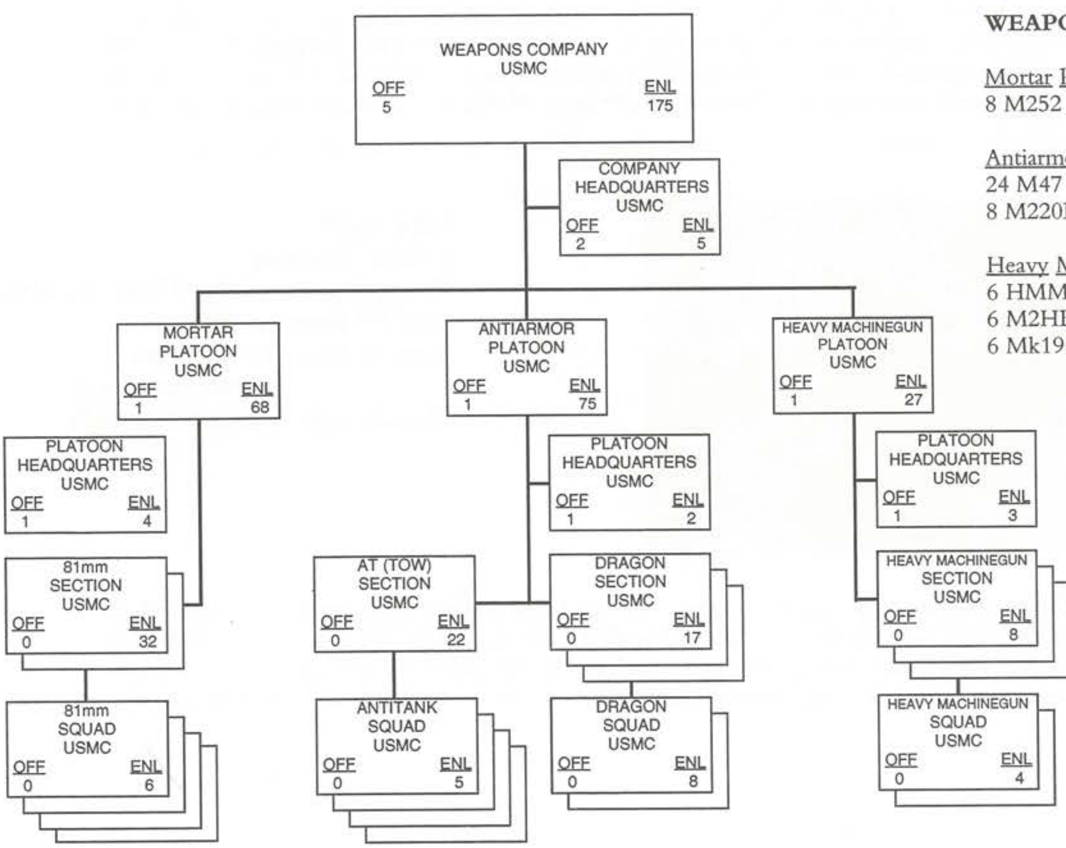

## RIFLE COMPANY WEAPONS

<u>Fire Team</u>
3 M16A3 Rifles
1 M203 Grenade Launcher
1 SAW

<u>Rifle Squad Leader</u>
1 M16A2

<u>Rifle Platoon Hq</u>
4 M16A2

<u>Wpns Platoon</u>
6 M240E1 Machineguns
3 M224 60mm Mortars
6 Mk153 SMAWs




## WEAPONS COMPANY WEAPONS

<u>Mortar Platoon</u>
8 M252 81mm Mortars

<u>Antiarmor Platoon</u>
24 M47 Dragons
8 M220E4 TOW2 (8 HMMVWs)

<u>Heavy Machinegun Platoon</u>
6 HMMVWs
6 M2HB .50 cal Machineguns
6 Mk19 40mm Machineguns



**M16A2 Rifle**
**Caliber: 5.56 mm**
**Weight (loaded): 8.8 lbs**
**Max Eff Range: 550 m (point)**
**800 m (area)**
**Rates of Fire: 45 rpm (semi)**
**90 rpm (burst)**
**Manufacturer: Fabrique Nationale, USA**

In 1984, the M16A2 replaced the M16A1 as the standard service rifle in the U.S. Marine Corps. It improved on the M16A1, introduced in 1967, in a number of ways. First, the full auto option was removed and replaced with a three-round-burst option. Then, the barrel was made heavier and stiffer to give greater accuracy and a new compensator was added to help reduce muzzle climb. Also, the handguard, butt, and grip are made from a stronger material. The M16A2 commonly uses either a 20- or 30-round magazine and can be fitted with the M7 bayonet. The M16A2 remains the primary weapon of the Corps' riflemen.

**M203 Grenade Launcher**
**Caliber: 40 mm**
**Weight: 3 lbs**
**Max Eff Range: 150 m (point)**
**350 m (area)**
**Max Range: 400 m**
**Manufacturer: Colt Industries**



The M203 grenade launcher is a lightweight, single-shot, breech-loaded, pump action, shoulder-fired weapon attached to the M16A2 rifle. There are a total of nine standard 40mm rounds used in the M203: star cluster, star parachute, smoke (ground), smoke (canopy), high explosive, dual purpose, fragmentation, CS, and practice. The M203 is a multipurpose weapon, allocated on the basis of one per fire team, nine per platoon.



**M249 SAW**
**Caliber: 5.56 mm**
**Weight (loaded w/200 rd box): 22.08 lbs**
**Max Eff Range: 1,000 m**
**Rates of Fire: 725 rpm (cyclic)**
**85 rpm (sustained)**
**Manufacturer: Fabrique Nationale**

The M249 squad automatic weapon (SAW) is a gas-operated, air-cooled, bipod-mounted individual weapon first introduced to the Corps in the mid-1980s. The SAW can accept belt-fed or magazine-loaded ammunition, although the M16 30-round magazine is normally only utilized in an emergency, as it reduces the weapons performance. The SAW is assigned to the automatic rifleman of each fire team, nine per platoon.



**M240G Machinegun**
**Caliber: 7.62 mm**
**Weight: 23.9 lbs**
**Max Eff Range: 1,800 m**
**Rates of fire: 600 rpm (cyclic)**
**100 rpm (sustained)**
**Manufacturer: Fabrique Nationale**

The M240G is a belt-fed, gas-operated, air-cooled machinegun which is currently coaxially mounted with the M242 25mm chain gun on the Corps' light armored vehicle (LAV–25s) and the 120mm gun on the M1A1 tank. In addition, the M240E1, a spade grip commander's configuration, is mounted on selected LAVs. As a result of the M240G's low mechanical failure rate, the Corps has procured excess weapons from the Army as replacements for the M60E3 and is modifying them so they can be fired with a bipod or mounted on a tripod.



**M60E3 Machinegun**
**Caliber: 7.62 mm**
**Weight: 18.5 lbs**
**Max Eff Range: 1,100 m**
**Rates of Fire: 550 rpm (cyclic)**
**100 rpm (sustained)**
**Manufacturer: Saco Defense**

The M60E3 replaced earlier models of the venerable M60 general purpose machinegun in 1985. It is a belt-fed, fully automatic, crew-served weapon. Originally introduced in the late 1950s, the M60 saw action in the Vietnam War—lessons learned there were applied to the construction of the M60E3. In order to correct noted deficiencies, the M60E3 was made lighter, the barrel was made easier to change, the gas system was simplified, a second pistol grip was added under the bipod, and a double sear notch was added to prevent uncontrolled fire. In 1989 the Corps opted for still further improvements to the M60E3 in order to increase weapon performance, reliability, and maintainability. The M60E3 can be fitted to a tripod or it can be fired from its attached bipod. Each rifle company has six M60E3s located in its weapons platoon. Variants of the M60 are also used on helicopters and on tracked and wheeled vehicles.



**M224 Mortar**
**Caliber: 60 mm**
**Weight: 44.0 lbs (total)**
**14.4 lbs (barrel)**
**14.4 lbs (baseplate-M8)**
**15.2 lbs (bipod)**
**Min Range: 45 m**
**Max Range: 1,814 m**
**Rates of Fire: 30 rpm (maximum)**
**18 rpm (sustained)**
**Manufacturer: U.S. Arsenals**

The 60mm mortar is a lightweight, smooth-bore, muzzle-loaded, high-angle indirect fire weapon. It can be fired two different ways: either in the conventional mode with the bipod and standard M7 baseplate set up or in the handheld mode using the lighter weight M8 baseplate. The 60mm mortar uses four types of ammunition: high explosive, white phosphorus, illumination, and practice. The high explosive round weighs 3.2 lbs, has a range of 1,814 meters, and has a multioption fuze that allows the mortarmen to select either high airburst, low airburst, point detonating, or delay. There are three M224s located in the mortar section of the weapons platoon in each infantry company.



**Mk 153 SMAW**
**Caliber: 83 mm**
**Weight (loaded): 29.01 lbs**
**Max Eff Range: 250 m (HEDP)**
**500 m (HEAA)**
**Manufacturer: McDonnell Douglas**

The shoulder-launched assault weapon (SMAW) is a one-man-operable, smoothbore, fiberglass rocket launcher with a 6-shot, 9mm spotting rifle attached to the right side of the tube and boresighted with the launcher. The sight mount, attached to the left side of the launcher, is designed to accommodate either a telescopic sight or the AN/PVS-4 night vision sight. The high explosive, dual purpose (HEDP) rocket (bunker buster) will detonate on impact with either a quick or slow time-delay fuze. It is able to penetrate 7 feet of wood-reinforced bunker, 8 inches of concrete, or 1 inch of steel armor. The high explosive antiarmor (HEAA) rocket is capable of penetrating 23.4 inches of rolled homogeneous armor. A total of six SMAWs are located in the assault section of the weapons platoon in each rifle company.

## BATTALION WEAPONS

**M40A1 Scout/Sniper Rifle**
**Caliber: 7.62 mm**
**Weight: 14.5 lbs**
**Max Eff Range: 1,000 m**
**Manufacturer: Remington Arms**



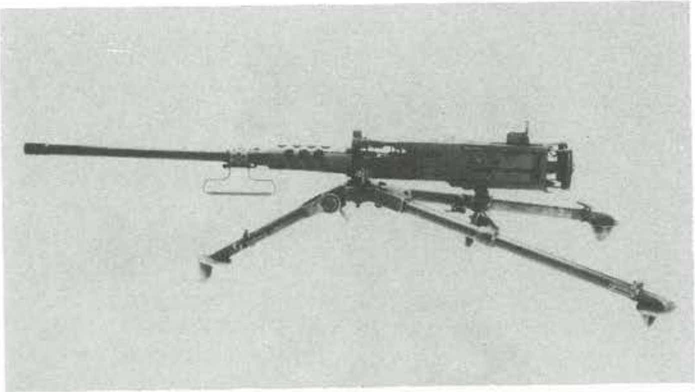
The M40A1 rifle is a modified version of the Remington 700 bolt-action rifle. It has a heavy barrel for accuracy and is always used with a 10x telescope. The M40A1 has a fiberglass stock and a 5-round integral magazine. There are eight M40A1s allocated to the scout snipers in the S-2 section of the infantry battalion.



**M82A1A SASR**
**Caliber: 12.7 mm**
**Weight: 32.5 lbs**
**Max Eff Range: 1,800 m**
**Manufacturer: Barrett**

The M82A1A special application scoped rifle (SASR) fires the same round as the M2HB heavy machinegun and is capable of accurately reaching ranges and penetrating armor that other rifles cannot. The 12.7mm round is available in armor-piercing, incendiary, or special explosive variations. The M82A1A carries 10 rounds in a detachable box magazine and is designed to be used primarily against material rather than personnel. There is a special allowance for two M82A1As for the scout snipers in the S-2 section of the infantry battalion.

**M2HB Browning Machinegun**
**Caliber: 12.7 mm**
**Weight: 128 lbs (total)**
**60 lbs (receiver group)**
**24 lbs (barrel)**
**44 lbs (tripod)**
**Max Eff Range: 1,830 m**
**Rates of Fire: 40 rpm (sustained)**
**450–550 rpm (cyclic)**
**Manufacturer: Saco Defense**



The Browning .50 caliber heavy barrel (HB) machinegun is a belt-fed, recoil-operated, air-cooled, crew-operated weapon. The machinegun is capable of firing single shot as well as automatic fire. The M2HB fires seven types of ammunition: ball tracer, armor-piercing, incendiary, armor-piercing incendiary, armor-piercing incendiary tracer, and blank. The .50 caliber is also mounted on tracked and wheeled vehicles. Six M2HB machineguns—along with six Mk19 40mm machineguns and six high mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicles (HMMWVs)—are located in the heavy machinegun platoon of the weapons company of each infantry battalion.

---



The M2HB depicted here is mounted on a HMMWV. The two-man crew may employ the .50 caliber in a number of ways, to include against light armored vehicles and low-flying enemy aircraft.The Mk19 40mm machinegun and the M220E4 TOW 2 (both described below) can be mounted similarly on the HMMWV.

---

**Mk19 Machinegun**
**Caliber: 40 mm**
**Weight: 75.6 lbs**
**Max Eff Range: 1,500 m**
**Rates of Fire: 40 rpm (sustained)**
**325–375 rpm (cyclic)**
**Manufacturer: Saco Defense**



The Mk19 40mm is a belt-fed, air-cooled, blow-back (weapon is operated by the exploding propellant charge) heavy machinegun. The Mk19 fires three types of rounds: the M383/M384, a high-explosive antipersonnel round, which can be fuzed for point detonation or graze/impact that has a casualty producing radius of 5 meters; the M430, a high-explosive, dual-purpose (antipersonnel/armor-piercing) round that can penetrate 2 inches of steel armor; and the M385 practice round. As noted above, there are six Mk19s—along with six M2HBs and six HMMWVs—in the heavy machinegun platoon of the weapons company of each infantry battalion. Additional Mk19s without dedicated personnel have been allocated as follows: four per H&S Co and one with the TOW section in the antiarmor platoon of the weapons company, both within the infantry battalion, and eight per regimental headquarters.



**M220E4 TOW 2**
**Caliber: 152 mm**
**Weight: 252.4 lbs (loaded)**
**205 lbs (launcher)**
**47.4 lbs (TOW 2 missile)**
**Min Eff Range: 65 m**
**Max Eff Range: 3,750 m**
**Manufacturer: Hughes Aircraft**

The tube-launched, optically tracked, wire command-link (TOW) guided missile is designed to defeat heavy armor and field fortifications and is manned by a gunner and an assistant. Like the Dragon, the TOW is wire-guided so its course can be altered by the gunner to keep it on target. The TOW 2A missile has a speed of 200 meters per second. It can be fired from a tripod, mounted on tracked and wheeled vehicles, or used on the AH-1W helicopter. There are 8 TOWs mounted on HMMWVs in the TOW section of the antiarmor platoon of the infantry battalion.

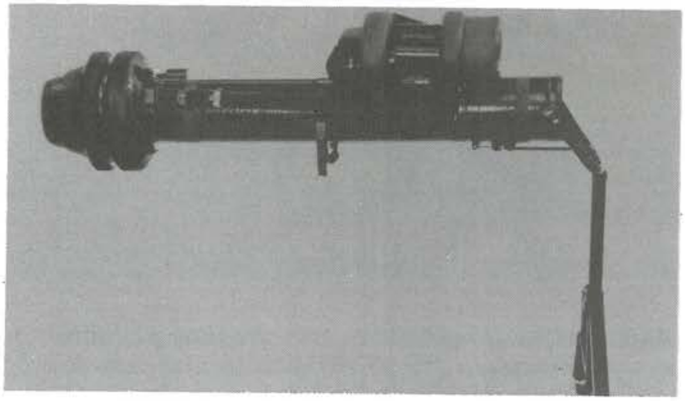
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**M252 Mortar**
**Caliber: 81 mm**
**Weight: 90.5 lbs (total)**
**35 lbs (barrel)**
**27 lbs (mount)**
**28.5 lbs (baseplate)**
**Min Range: 100 m**
**Max Range: 5,733 m**
**Rates of Fire: 30 rpm (maximum)**
**15 rpm (sustained)**
**Manufacturer: Royal Ordnance**



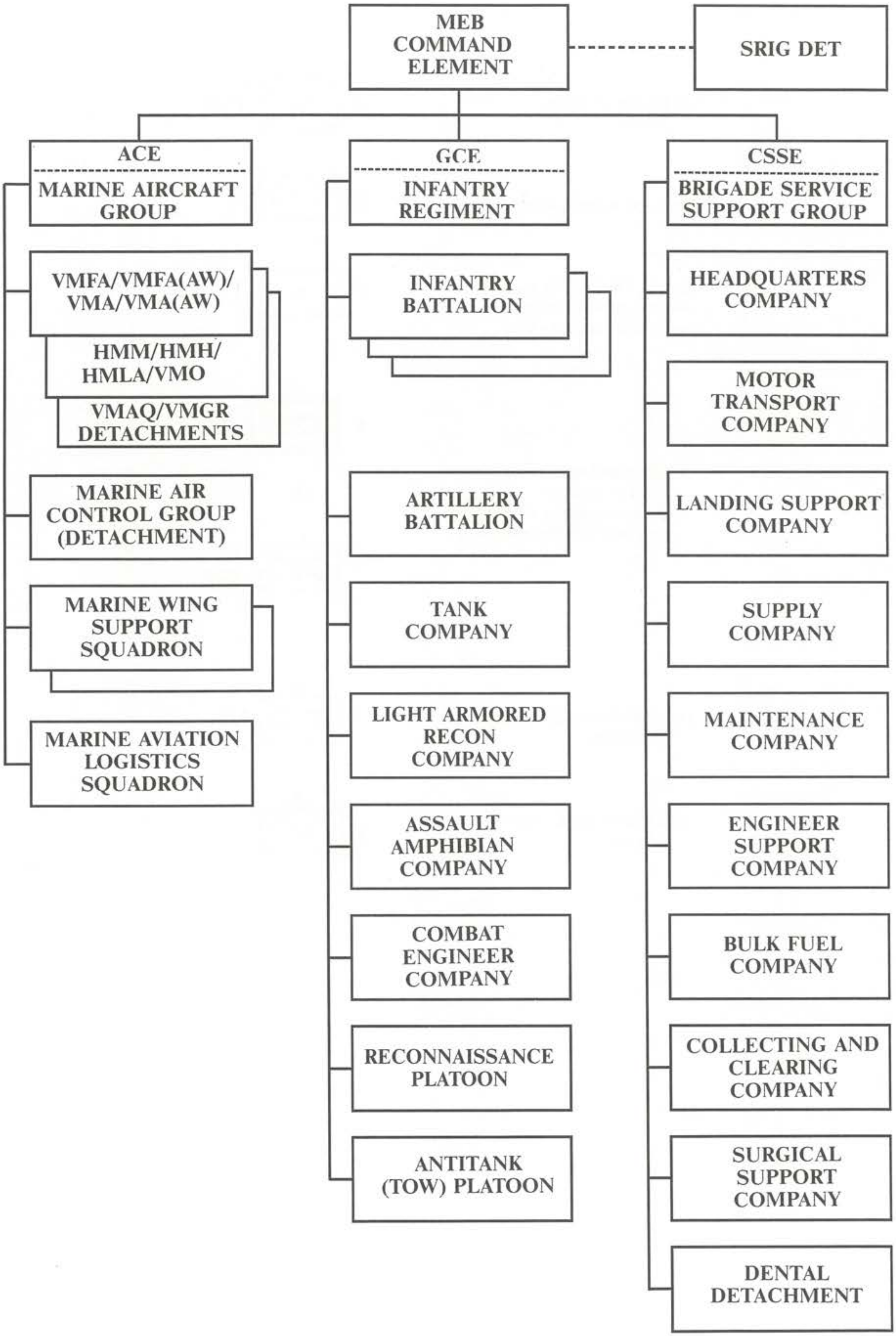
The 81mm mortar is a high-angle, indirect fire weapon used for close and continuous fire support. The 81mm mortar uses six types of ammunition: high explosive, white and red phosphorus, illumination, training practice, and training. The M889 high explosive round weighs 9 pounds, has a range of 5,733 meters, and has a burst radius of 40 meters. The M252 also has a removable firing pin that provides greater safety in clearing misfires. There are eight M252s located in the mortar platoon of the weapons company in each infantry battalion.

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**M47 Dragon**
**Caliber: 114. 3 mm**
**Weight: 31 lbs**
**Min Eff Range: 65 m**
**Max Eff Range: 1,000 m**
**Manufacturer: McDonnell Douglas**

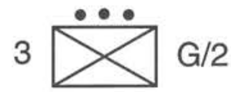
The M47 Dragon is a man-portable, medium-range antiarmor weapon. It fires a sight-guided missile from a recoilless launcher that has a smooth, fiberglass barrel. A sensor on the missile tracks its course and relays signals through the fine wires trailed by the missile. Thus, the gunner can adjust the course of the missile while in flight as long as he can see the target. The Dragon II missile covers its maximum range in 11.2 seconds. The Dragon has a crew of 2, and there are 24 launchers in the antiarmor platoon of the weapons company of an infantry battalion.



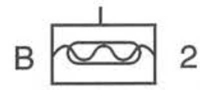

*Typical Marine Expeditionary Brigade*

# Answers to Unit Symbol Test

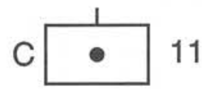
3d Plt, Co G, 2d Bn,
2d Mar



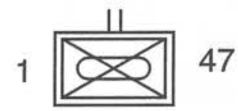

Co B, 2d Assault, Amphibian Bn



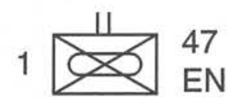

Btry C, 1st Bn, 11th Mar
(Bn designation not needed;
only 1st Bn has Btry C.)



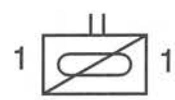

1st Bn, 47th Mech Inf Regt,
22d Div (Enemy)
(Div designation not needed;
only one 47th Mech Inf Regt.)



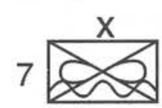

Or




1st Light Armored Recon Bn,
1st MarDiv




7th Marine Expeditionary
Brigade



# Index



# About the Author

An active-duty infantry officer for 12 years, John Schmitt commanded Weapons Company, 3d Battalion, 6th Marines and Company A, 2d Light Armored Vehicle Battalion. He is the author of *Operational Handbook 6–1, Ground Combat Operations; FMFM 1, Warfighting*; and *FMFM 1–1 Campaigning*. He has taught at Marine Corps schools from The Basic School to the Command & Staff College. His last active duty assignment was as the Marine officer instructor at the University of Illinois. A major in the Reserve, he currently resides in Champaign, IL, with his wife and two cocker spaniels.

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